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# A HISTORY OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF FLORENCE,

FROM  
THE EARLIEST INDEPENDENCE OF THE COMMUNE  
TO THE FALL OF THE REPUBLIC IN 1531.

BY

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AUTHOR OF "THE GIRLHOOD OF CATHERINE DE' MEDICI," "THE LIFE OF FILIPPO STROZZI,"  
"PAUL THE FRIAR AND PAUL THE POPE," ETC.

IN FOUR VOLS.

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## PREFACE.

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THE narrative offered to the reader in these volumes, is the history of the future capital of Italy. It contains also, as the writer hopes and believes, such an exposition of the antecedents of the old Guelph community, as sufficiently demonstrates the fitness of this culmination of the grand old city's fortunes, and the justification, apart from any of the more pressing considerations of contemporary political expediency, of the preferment which has been awarded to her. Despite all those faults and shortcomings which marred the early destinies of Florence, and which have been set forth in the following pages with the severity of one wishing to utilize a warning, rather than with the indulgence of one mainly anxious to direct admiration to what was admirable,—despite all this, many of the thoughts and many of the feelings which have contributed to the civilization of the world have gone forth from Florence. And Italy has of course, in far larger proportion, been similarly indebted to her. If the city and community, which has contributed most towards bringing Italy and its people to such a point of advance-

ment as to make freedom and self-government a feasible attempt for them, be deserving of being chosen as the leader and head of its new career, the claim of Florence to the distinction must, I think, be conceded. If the characteristics ineradicably implanted in the nature of a people by the traditional thoughts of many generations are of the highest importance in deciding the question, to which of all the very differing communities of the country should belong the task and privilege of influencing the social life of the others, in such sort as the capital of a great kingdom influences the provinces of it, then surely Florence must be the most wisely chosen capital of future Italy.

Any attempt, however, to develop these conclusions, as arising from the consideration of the history here offered to the reader, as well as any setting forth of the numerous other grounds on which the choice of Florence for the definitive capital of Italy may be well believed to be the wisest that could have been made, would be out of place here. The latter belong to various classes of subjects foreign to the proper business of this work; and the deductions which lead to the former must be left to the appreciation of the reader of it.

Assuredly, however, when the present writer began collecting materials for this work, amid the bitter disappointments and disillusiones which in Italy, more than in any other part of Europe, followed the awakened hopes of 1848, it was without the slightest shadow of an expectation



that he would live to see the subject of his projected task preferred to the greatness that has now in the fulness of time come upon her. Men were working—as is mostly the manner of human work—to, though not *for* this end; and they were wholly ignorant of the goal to which their endeavours tended. Nor was there any revelation of that goal till this work was composed almost in its entirety.

With regard to the manner in which the proposed task has been attempted, it may be as well to say a few words.

It has not been the writer's aim to produce such a narrative as he would have endeavoured to write had he been writing the story, even on an equally compressed scale, of any period of our own history; nor such a book as would be accepted as a completely satisfactory story of Florence by the Florentines. In either of these cases, it would have been necessary to attempt a more exhaustive narrative of events than the writer of the present work has deemed desirable. He has endeavoured to make his narrative a *full* narrative of that which has been narrated. But much has been omitted which, though it would, if appertaining to English history, be interesting to Englishmen, and as belonging to Florentine story be interesting to Florentines, has appeared to the writer more calculated to confuse the reader's view of the great march and development of the history, than to gratify his curiosity. It has seemed to the writer especially necessary to pay attention to this consideration in the case of Florentine

history: for the abundance of historical material is such, that, with regard to every portion of the Florentine annals, except quite the earliest, it would still be possible to compose a narrative almost as detailed and minute as that furnished by the annual chroniclers of contemporary history. But however interesting a history written on a scale calculated to comprise all the information that has been preserved respecting the past of Florence, may be to the descendants of those who made that history, and to the historical antiquarian, it is not such a history that an English reader wants. The writer believes that what is wanted is such an account of the old Florentine Commonwealth as, while leaving many a fact untold, should leave no link in the chain of causes and effects which produced that political and social development, unmarked or unexplained;—such an account as should not fail to leave the reader informed of the full significance and proper place in the story of all those names of persons and of places which have become household words in every European language; and should place in a clear light the amount and the nature of that which Florence has contributed to the civilization and progress of Italy and of mankind.

How far the present history may have succeeded in attaining these objects, it is, of course, for the reader to judge.

It may be mentioned further, however, that the writer, looking to the desirability of occupying his pages with that which has not, as he ventures to believe, been as satis-

factorily offered to the English reader already, has abstained from enlarging on one of the most pleasing and tempting branches of his subject;—the literary and artistic history of the brilliant Medicean period. He is not indeed disposed to admit, that that Medicean era comprised in truth the high and palmy state of Florentine literature or art. And some remarks on this subject will be found in their proper places in the course of this work. Whatever that age may have been in respect of æsthetic culture, it was unquestionably a period of political decadence; and it may well be questioned if such a time can be found to have ever coincided, or can be expected ever to coincide, with a period of high literary or artistic worth. But however this may be, the literature and art of the Medicean age have been so amply and so brilliantly treated in works which have long been favourites with the public, and are in the hands of every one, that it has seemed to the present writer that in going over the same ground, he would not only be doing that which was unneeded, but would risk doing it far less well than it has been done already. The celebrated and universally read works of Roscoe are admirable as literary and artistic histories; and, as guides to the literature and art of the period in question, leave nothing to be desired by those who are duly on their guard against the social and political fallacies and errors with which they abound. And the writer hopes that the readers of his own pages will be so on their guard; and will be in a position to

profit by Roscoe's splendid and brilliant pictures of the Medicean era, without the danger of being led to accept that rose-coloured brilliancy for more than it was worth.

There remains one more word to be said. The present writer has in former years given to the public certain episodes of Florentine history, the result of his many years' reading on the subject. And as he found that he was unable to say what had to be said on certain portions of the latter days of the Commonwealth, better than he had already said it, such passages of these former works—mainly from a volume entitled “The Girlhood of Catherine de' Medici”—as were to the purpose, have been incorporated in the present history. The remark applies, however, only to a few pages.

FLORENCE,  
8th March, 1865.



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58 YEARS.

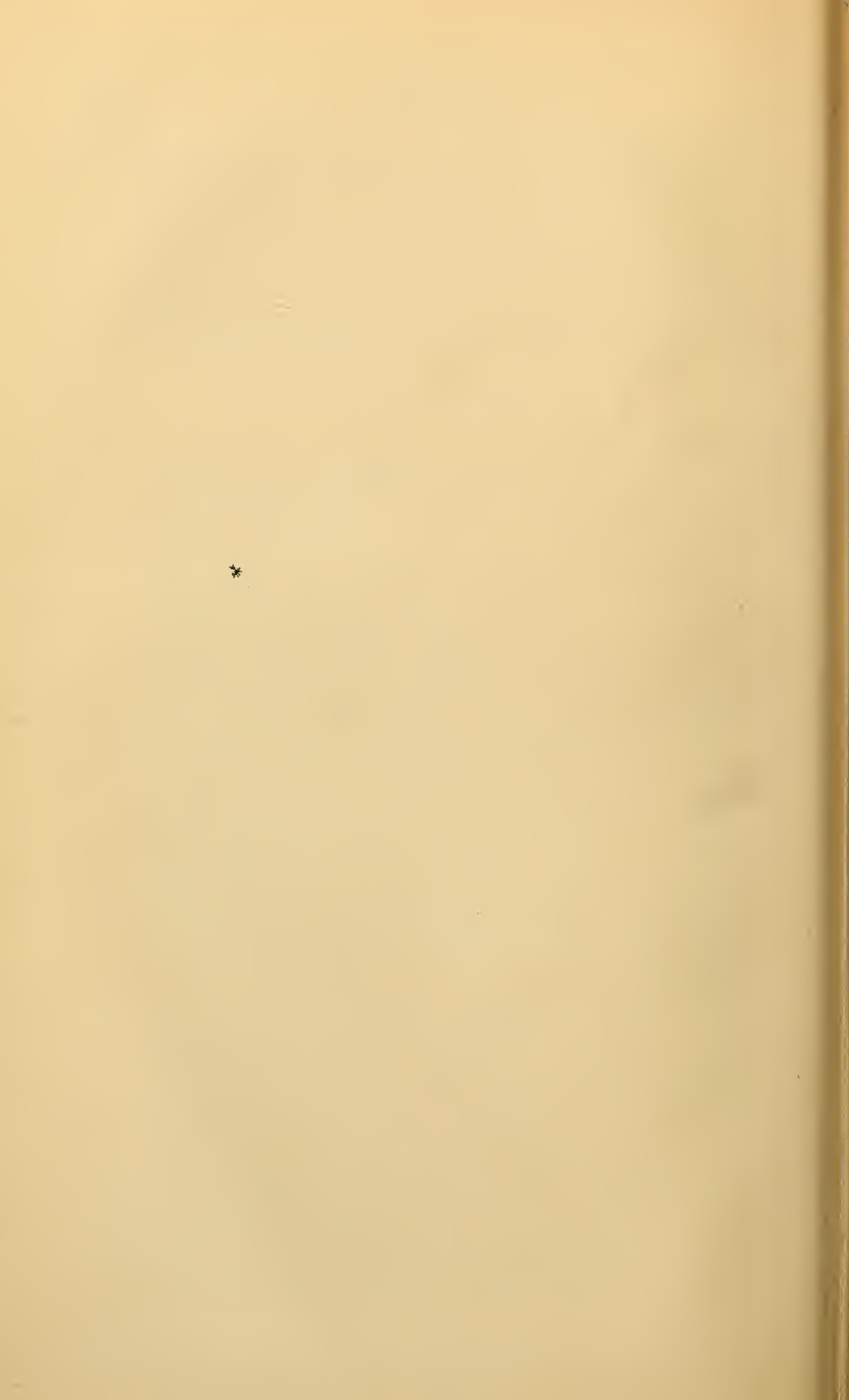
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# HISTORY

OF THE

## COMMONWEALTH OF FLORENCE.

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### INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER.

Municipal civilization in Italy—Its capabilities—Rapid growth of Italian civilization—And its early decay—What was the cause of its decay?—History of Florence specially fitted to furnish a reply to this question—The completeness and splendour of the subject—Duration of the Florentine Republic—The terms “Commune,” “Republic,” “Commonwealth”—The latter preferred—Influences that shaped the course of Italian mediæval history—1st. The idea of the Roman Empire—2nd. The relationship between the Empire and the Church—3rd. The tendency to a municipal organization inherited from the Roman civilization—Earliest notices of Florence—Florentine petition to the Roman Senate recorded by Tacitus—The historian Malispini—His præ-historic legends—Giovanni Villani—His history—Dante’s notice of the early legends—Catiline—Attila—Charlemagne at Florence—The Countess Matilda—Slightness of her connection with Florentine history—Modern speculations on the history of Matilda—Father Tosti—Gregory VII.—Influence of Matilda on the rise of the *Comuni*.

IN every part of Europe the municipal element in modern civilization has contributed an important portion to the building up of the various social systems now existing around us. But in Italy that element has entered far more largely than elsewhere into the composite fabric of society, as it there exists at the present day. The feudal system, planted in Italy as elsewhere in Europe by the Frankish conquerors, never thrived, nor took kindly to the



soil, in which the roots of the old Roman civilisation had ineradicably spread their fibres. While to the north of the Alps the ideas and principles of feudalism took possession of the whole mass of social life with marvellous rapidity, fashioning in their own likeness State and Church, town and country, nobles and villains, in Italy they proved unable to extirpate the older ideas, which remained imperishable, after the bodily form of the social system that had generated them had long since perished; and they quickly dwindled and died out before the encroachments of a theory of human society far richer in capabilities for social progress. Feudalism died out, as of course we all know, elsewhere also, destroyed by the same competing element assisted by some other influences. But it did so northward of the Alps very much more slowly. It possessed there the entire social life of the people long enough, and completely enough, to tinge quite ineffaceably all their institutions, all their thoughts, and all their customs. It was not so in Italy. Italian feudalism never grew to its full stature. Stunted from its birth, it perished in its infancy, strangled by the municipal system; which forthwith took possession of the national life, and succeeded in moulding it in its own outward forms and inward spirit, strikingly in contrast, both of them, with those of its vanquished opponent.

Few thinkers, probably, would be found to doubt, at the present day, that the municipal system, as it was developed in Italy, possesses capabilities of carrying social life to a larger and higher degree of civilisation, and of approaching more nearly to our present best ideal of it, than the competing theory of organization. Still less can it be doubted, that it is calculated to bring its good fruit to maturity far more rapidly than feudalism ever succeeded in ripening the best results it was capable of producing. The path on which Italy entered, on first emerging out of



the barbarism which followed the fall of the Roman Empire, was then, to all appearance, calculated not only to lead its people far more quickly to a high degree of beneficent social activity and civilization, than that on which every other European nation started; but to carry them onwards further, and for a longer time in the same favourable direction.

Yet although it very strikingly produced the first of these results, it as remarkably failed to accomplish the latter. Italy did, at the beginning of the race, outstrip the social progress of every other nation. She reached what must up to the present day be considered as the culminating point of her civilization, while her competitors were still struggling painfully, and with far smaller advancement, among the impediments which beset the early stages of their upward journey. But her brilliant career was a comparatively short one. The path, that seemed to promise so much, came treacherously and suddenly to a most fatal ending. When the other European nations were just beginning to emerge from the comparative barbarism of the earlier stages of their national existence, the palmy days of Italy were well nigh over. When her sisters were just entering on the adult portion of their lives, with such more or less well founded hopes of a fruitful and progressive future, as the peculiarities and character of each had prepared for it, Italy was already decrepit. The favourite in the great race, who had appeared to be so far ahead of all the field, as to leave no possibility that she should be overtaken, allowed every lagging outsider to pass her. She rushed from the starting-post, and made all her running in the first turn of the course. She knocked up, and was nowhere during the remainder of the race;—as far as it has yet been run, let it be added. For it is not over; and there may be some even betting yet!

But our present business is with the past. And it can-

not be denied that the history of Italy up to the days of the present generation has been that of one of those wonderfully precocious children, whose extraordinarily early and brilliant development seems to have necessarily involved a proportionably early decay.

Now, of all the problems proposed by the history of mankind for the instruction of politicians, and the interest of philosophic students of social phenomena, there is none more instructive, nor more interesting, than the question, why this was the case. Why did the path of civilization, on which Italy entered, and which led her so far, and seemed to promise well for carrying her so much farther, come to so sudden an end? What was the cause which sapped all her energies, moral and intellectual, and left her to premature decrepitude? Was there some canker at the root of her civilization, which from the beginning destined it to an early death? Was it that Italy, like some vigorous tree, which puts forth its blossoms too early in the spring, and is in consequence doomed to lose them by some late frost, came to an early death, by reason of the earliness of her civilization, in the raw spring-time which followed the winter of barbarism? Was she simply and purely crushed, without fault of hers, by the wrongful violence and superior brute force of outnumbering hordes of comparatively barbarous neighbours? Did a corrupting material prosperity cause first her moral decadence, and then, in necessary sequence, her material ruin? She started, as has been said, on a different road from the other nations, and she arrived at premature decrepitude, while they were yet in the vigour of youth. Are these two facts to be connected together in the relation of cause and effect? Is there some latent vice, some predisposing tendency to decay and dissolution in the constitution of the municipal form of social organization, by which the phenomena of the case can be accounted for?

It seems to me that a satisfactory answer to these inquiries will be the main object sought by an historical student in his examination of the brightest periods of Italian history ; and further, that the history of Florence is pre-eminently fitted to furnish the instruction required. The conditions of the problem there present themselves in the sharpest outline and completest perfection of development. No finer specimen of the mediæval "commune" has ever existed. Nowhere did the municipal system organise itself more vigorously, or develop its own special fruits more freely, spontaneously, and thoroughly. Nowhere have the good and great things, which that system is calculated to produce, been seen in greater force and abundance ; and nowhere was the collapse and failure more signal than in that "most republican of all republics."

No quality is wanting to the subject, which could contribute to fit it completely and admirably for analytical examination by inquirers into the laws which regulate social systems and schemes of government. The action is complete, and rounded off in its entirety with a degree of finality rarely to be met with in human affairs. The causes seen at work have produced their effects ;—not, of course, their absolutely final effects ; for such finality is to be found in no portion of the world's history ;—but they have produced their results so completely, that the political student may fairly consider the account to be closed, and a broad and most unmistakeable line to have been drawn across the page, between the death of one social system, and the birth of another.

The smallness of the theatre too on which the action has taken place, and the comparatively microscopic scale of the organization to be examined, is also an advantageous circumstance. The subject is not unwieldy. We can have the whole of it conveniently beneath our eyes, and estimate



all the more accurately the relationships of the various parts, and the strength of the forces in operation.

But if the story I have undertaken to tell, be remarkable for the completeness of the subject of study it presents to the political inquirer, it is at least equally so for its magnificence as an historical drama. It is, I think, no exaggeration to say that the annals of mankind offer no second story so brilliant, so varied, so rich in incident, so full of action, so conversant with names, which have become household words in every age and in every clime, and so perfect in its epic completeness, as that of the rise, progress, and fall of the Commonwealth of Florence. Those, whose minds have been filled, and their imaginations excited at the time of life when they were most impressionable, by the story of the Athenian glory in arts and arms, may be inclined perhaps to give the preference to the glowing picture, in part, assuredly fancy-coloured, of that brilliant episode in the annals of mankind. They may assert, though not perhaps with such entire truth as many persons will probably at first sight be inclined to imagine, that the intellectual culture of Athens has left deeper traces of its operation, and produced larger results on the subsequent civilization of mankind, than any of the ideas, which have been contributed to the heritage of humanity by the four centuries of Florentine freedom, and the great minds produced under its influence. The question may at all events well be considered an open one; while it cannot but be felt, that the utterly different constitution of society in the ancient Pagan and slaveholding community removes it very much further away from us, our sympathies, and our interests, than can ever be the case with the national life of a people, the sharers of our religion, and in a great degree the co-heirs of the same fundamental elements of civilization. It must be remembered also, that notwithstanding all that has been so

successfully done by a long series of scholars, critics, and historians, the knowledge which it is possible for us to attain of the real life and minds of Athens and the Athenians is very vague, unsubstantial, and dim, compared to that resulting from the matchless abundance of Florentine history, and material for history, which places the whole body of the old Florentine life before our eyes, and enables us to comprehend each aim, each feeling, each prejudice of every actor on the scene.

This history in its epic completeness is comprised within a period of little more than four hundred years;—from the beginning of the contests between the neighbouring territorial nobles and the infant Commune, which thus characteristically manifested its earliest consciousness of life and strength, about the year 1107, to the fall of the Republic in 1531. The latter unhappy date may of course be stated with exact precision. The 5th of July in that year was the ill-omened day on which Duke Alexander of the Medici entered into conquered and prostrate Florence. The former date, as may be easily understood, cannot be named with equal certainty. An event may consummate the death agony of a social system. The more composite forces, which contributed to bring it into existence, work rather after the unseen fashion of the forces of nature in the production of the organic world. And the hour when a new social organism may be said to have received the breath of life cannot with accuracy be discerned.

The new social organism, whose birth-time marks the beginning of the period above mentioned was the Commune of Florence;—"Il Comune di Firenze." And the history, which it is proposed to relate in these volumes is that of the Commune of Florence from its birth to its death. Such was the title by which the social unit was known to the members of it. And there are associations of ideas connected with the more recently used term



“Republic” injudiciously, as Italians say, adopted by Sismondi, which make the original term the preferable one. It is true that the idea suggested to the mind of a thirteenth century Florentine citizen by the phrase “Respublica,” was identical with that attached by him to his own “Comune.” For Brunetto Latini, Dante’s master, who died in 1294, in his translation of Sallust, renders the Roman writer’s “Respublica” by the phrase “Il Comune.” But it is by no means true that every Commune was republican in its constitution, according to our conception of the meaning of that word; which was not commonly used in Italy, till classicism and classical phraseology were brought into vogue by the revival of the ancient literature in the fifteenth century.

For these reasons it has been regretted by Italian students and patriots, that Sismondi, whose popular work was for several years the main source of such acquaintance with Italian history as was possessed by readers to the north of the Alps, should have entitled his book the History of the Italian Republics, instead of that of the Italian Communes. But there is a thoroughly English word, which seems to give accurately the sense of the old Florentine phrase, and to convey satisfactorily to English minds the very same concrete notion which the citizen of Florence of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries attached to the well-loved title, “Il Comune.” In Tuscany, at all events, if not perhaps with equal accuracy in all other parts of Italy, “Il Comune” may be well translated, THE COMMONWEALTH.

And I have accordingly placed that word in the title-page of these volumes, in which it is intended to give the entire story from birth to death of the social unit so named.

I have assigned the date, 1107, as about that of the birth of the Florentine Commonwealth. It will be neces-

sary, however, to say a few words—and but a few—of the previous history of Florence, and of the state of things, which prepared the way for the rise of that form of social life.

The destinies of Italy were directed to the issues and fashioned into the shape they gradually assumed, during the centuries which succeeded that chaos without form and void, resulting from the breaking up of the Roman Empire in the West, mainly by three influencing causes.

The first of these was the title of Roman Emperor, and the idea of the Roman Empire, which had survived the universal wreck, as ideas will survive, and had been bequeathed to the nascent civilization by its deceased predecessor.

The second was the new relationship towards each other assumed by the Empire and the Church.

The third was the wonderfully indestructible tendency towards a municipal form of organization, which the old Roman civilization had so vigorously impressed on the races governed by it, that it had become an instinctive part of their hereditary nature; and which powerfully modified the materials subjected to the influences of the other two recited causes.

And the mode of the operation of each of these three causes was as follows:—

Firstly. The idea of a Roman Empire and a Roman Emperor, bequeathed by the old to the new civilization, encouraged and enabled a succession of foreign potentates on the north of the Alps to aim at and partially accomplish the realisation of that idea; and to claim and obtain a very considerable degree of submission to their authority on the southern side of that great boundary line. It was the prevailing notion that the existence of this Imperial authority was the natural and Heaven-decreed constitution of things. Men talked of “One God, one Emperor, and

one Pope!" and felt as if the enunciation of the triad thus devised, carried with it not only an argument in favour of the whole, but an entire conviction of the necessity of each of its terms to the due stability and acknowledgment of the other two. It seemed to the simple-minded holders of this triangular formula, that the chipping off of either apex would cause the entire symbol to fall to ruin, after the manner of those crystals which fly to pieces if mutilated in any part. And it was not to be expected that they should perceive that their broken symbol might be split into any number of equally well-fancied triads; even as the disintegrated crystal is crushed but to repeat the original form in every fragment. We have hardly yet earned the right to smile too scornfully at such foundations of popular opinions, or to find it very difficult to believe that the notion, which thus made part of the intellectual atmosphere breathed from the cradle upwards by those generations, availed more probably than all the Imperial forces that ever crossed the Alps in supporting the Imperial claims in Italy. But for all that, the success with which the Emperors asserted these claims to authority in Italy was but partial, and especially fitful. Those claims were recognised theoretically to a far greater degree than they were submitted to practically. An erroneous idea of the social condition of those centuries from the fifth to the twelfth is very frequently formed by those who do not make a sufficient allowance for the discrepancies that existed between the theories and the practice of those ages in every department of life. It is a slow business in every social system to bring them into some tolerable degree of accord. And the disaccord between them in that spring-time of a society in its salad days was greater than is generally borne in mind by students, who forget that the theories then accepted are easily read in the legislation and official documents of all



kinds belonging to the period, while the realities of their practice have to be gleaned and inferred with far greater difficulty from the much more meagre and less certain record of men's deeds.

But of all the accepted social theories of the time, this one of the Imperial authority in Italy was sure especially to fail in practical application. Those Frankish and German potentates were attempting an essentially impossible thing. At a period and in a social condition, when the successful exercise of authority necessarily depended on the personal qualities of him who claimed to wield it, they sought to rule by deputing their power to others. The extent of the empire claimed made it impossible for them to do otherwise. But the social elements of which it consisted made it equally impossible for such a scheme to succeed. If the hands to which this vainly-deputed power was entrusted were weak, it was wrested out of their grasp. If they were strong enough to hold it, they held it for themselves. Whether Count, Marquis, Vicar Imperial, Bishop, Lieutenant, or Podestà, the result was always the same. Yet the theory of the Imperial supremacy was always operative to a certain degree. And from time to time, when circumstances were favourable,—when the usually distant and unseen Cæsar appeared in the flesh on the Italian horizon, or when some competitor for power found it convenient to strengthen himself against a rival by a temporary fidelity to the Imperial ideal,—then the theory became for awhile a practical reality.

It is a difficult, intricate, and, for the most part, thankless task to trace the ever-changing ebbings and flowings of the Imperial authority in the different provinces and cities of Italy. But the general result of this state of things, which is all that is important to our present purpose, may be easily stated and understood. It was, that the continual state of uncertainty and fluctuation, in which

the elements of society were held in Italy by this ever-varying struggle between the theoretical supremacy of the Emperor and the practical independence of his variously-entitled agents, was singularly favourable to the gradual formation of a new power, which could hardly have found the means of growing and strengthening itself and swelling into influence and importance, as it did, under any other conceivable circumstances. It was to the state of fluidity, as it were, in which the social elements were held by the theoretical admission and practical disregard of the Imperial authority that it was due, that THE TOWNS had time and opportunity to grow into independent and self-sustained political bodies; and although that old superstition of the "Holy Roman Empire" has, with strange vitality, survived, not altogether uninfluentially, even to the days of men still living, that earliest effect of its operation, which has been described above, has been, I think, the most important result that has flowed from it to Italy.

The second of the influences named as having contributed largely towards shaping the destinies of the new social system, evolving itself out of the chaos that followed the fall of the Empire of the West, was the new relationship assumed towards each other by the new Empire and the Church.

That this relationship, from having been amicable as long as the infant Church needed the protection of the Imperial power, became hostile to an internecine degree of bitterness, when the Church, grown strong, aspired to gather all power into its own hands, is sufficiently well known to every reader. We shall find this quarrel, in the subsequent stages of its long course, very actively influencing the domestic affairs of Florence during a large and most interesting period of its history. But our present business is merely to note how the first outbreak of

these enmities—from the middle of the eleventh to the middle of the twelfth century—contributed to prepare the way for the social system which, about that period, precipitated itself in solid form from the chaotic fluid in which all the social elements had been held in solution by the electric forces of that thunder-storm from the north which had fused them.

It could not but be, that the Church and the Empire should come to conflict. The doctrines held by the former made it absolutely impossible that the two powers should for long continue side by side in amity. No authority in this world ever based its claims to the submission of mankind on so logical a theory as the Roman Catholic Church. Admit its first fundamental postulates, and fully all that any Pontiff ever claimed, must, if men would act logically, be granted. If it be indeed true, that a priesthood is in possession of exclusive access to infallible truth respecting the paramount objects and interests of man's sojourn on earth, a very short series of syllogisms, starting from this premiss, must lead to the inevitable conclusion that a pure theocracy is the best and only reasonable form of government. Men did admit universally and unreservedly the postulate, and were ready to go great lengths towards accepting the conclusion. Partially, fitfully, and unreasoningly men did accept it, monarchs as well as their subjects. But they were not sufficiently logical, or sufficiently practical believers in their principles, to act up to them thoroughly and consistently. And this inconsistency not only contributed to keep the elements of society in that state of uncertainty and fluidity which has been described as favourable to the rise of the Communes, but by setting enmity between the two powers already in possession of the field, provided that invaluable opportunity for the birth of a third, which such contests always afford. Had there been amity and alliance between those two powers—had



the Church of those days contented itself, as we have seen it content itself in later generations, with simoniacally truckling its logical pretensions for the Imperial support of its power over the people; or had the Emperor bowed sufficiently lowly and sufficiently perseveringly before Gregory VII. and his successors to secure the patronage and benediction of the Church, the fashioning of the new social system to the south of the Alps would not, it may be safely asserted, have fallen into the hands of the Communes. As it was, Catholic sentiment was always ready to be appealed to as an excuse and ground for refusing to submit to Imperial prerogative; and allegiance to the Empire served as a pretext equally at hand when needed for the resistance to ecclesiastical encroachment. The great competitors for power over the world fell out; and the citizens of the Communes were, in a great measure owing to their quarrel, enabled to get and to hold their own, until—at least in the case with which these pages are concerned—an alliance and friendship between the lay and the priestly tyrant,—an alliance infinitely more corrupt, more false, and more scandalous than their old state of feud,—enabled the two together to crush the political system, which had become so strong as to be able to hold its own against either of its enemies singly.

The third of the influences named above as the agents mainly operative in shaping the new social system in Italy in the form assumed by it, was the tendency to a municipal organization inherited from the old Roman civilization. And it cannot be doubted, I think, that without this legacy from Roman habits of life and modes of thought, the other two agents described, largely and profoundly as they must, in any case, have modified the society subjected to their influence, would not have sufficed to produce so highly organised a result, and so vigorous a political growth, as that to which the larger Communes almost at once

attained, as soon as the circumstances favourable to their development arrived.

In truth, in the case of Florence more especially, that development may be said to have taken place, almost with the rapidity of a sudden bound. It is true that a series of scanty, and for the most part uncertain, notices indicate, with a degree of consistency which may be accepted as amounting on the whole to satisfactory proof, that from the earliest years of the Christian era there existed a social community of some sort on the bank of the Arno below the ancient Etruscan city of Fiesole, on the site of the present city of Florence. One of the earliest of these notices is also one of the most authentic and indisputable. It is furnished by Tacitus;\* and it is curious that the first clear mention of the city should refer to a subject, which is still, after the lapse of more than eighteen centuries, one of interest and importance. In the year 16 A.D. it was debated in the Senate, the historian cited tells us, whether or no any steps should be taken to prevent the calamitous inundations of the Tiber by diverting some of the waters which it receives in its course into other channels. It was proposed thus to turn into the Arno the waters of the Chiana, then called the Clanis, which are shut out from the valley of the former river by only a singularly low water-shed. But any such plan was strongly deprecated by deputies from several municipalities and colonies, which were heard by the Senate in opposition to the plan. There were deputies from Terni, Rieti, and other places present; but those from Florence were the spokesmen before the Senate. They urged that their territories would be devastated by the excess of water thus thrown into the Arno; and added among other arguments the curious one, that respect ought to be shown to rivers, to which the inhabitants of their banks had dedi-

\* Annal. lib. i. sec. 79, edit. Gronov.



cated temples, and groves, and altars. And, says Tacitus, whether it were that the entreaties of the colonists, or the difficulty of the proposed work, or superstition availed to decide the question, the result was that nothing was done. Long centuries afterwards, under the Medici, modifications were introduced into the natural drainage of the district in question, with a view to reclaim the swampy and pestilential valley of the Chiana. And Florence *did* suffer from inundations, which were thought to have been caused or aggravated by these works. At a still later period improved science was brought to bear on the subject under the Dukes of the Lorrain dynasty. And the Val di Chiana, no longer pestilential, is now a vast and wonderfully fertile corn-field; and the discharge of its waters is so managed, it is said, as to secure Florence and the lower valley of the Arno from any danger of being flooded in the future.

It is a matter of historical certainty, therefore, that a community called Florentia existed on the spot now occupied by Florence, sixteen years after the commencement of our era; and that this community was not only of sufficient importance to send a deputation which was respectfully listened to by the Roman Senate, but was of such eminence in Italy that its deputies, among those of many other cities much nearer to the great centre of civilisation, were chosen to be the spokesmen for all the petitioners.

An antiquity thus venerable, and a first appearance in history thus respectable, were however by no means sufficient to satisfy the patriotism of the earliest Florentine historians.

The father of the long and illustrious line of these is the venerable Ricordano Malispini. He was born probably in the second decade of the thirteenth century. He died in 1285, and his chronicle ends in 1282, though brought down four years later by his nephew. But it begins with Adam.

“From Adam till the time of King Ninus, who conquered the entire world in battle, and subjected it to his power, at the time when Abraham was born, there were 2344 years.” A brief mention of the three parts of the world then follows, and a description of the boundaries of Europe. “In which part thus bounded was one primal lord, whose name was Atalan, or Jupiter. And his wife was beautiful; and her name was Electra. And with them lived Apollonius, a great master of astrology (*Strolomia*); and all their doings were ordered by his advice. And they together with him chose and selected out of all their realm a sovereign spot, where they founded Fiesole, which was the first city built in the world after the flood of the Ark of Noah. And this spot was chosen by Apollonius as the most salubrious, that is, in respect of its air and in respect of being under the influence of the biggest and most auspicious planet that could be found.”

It may be thought, perhaps, from this exordium, that it would have been better to throw into the præ-historic period all the space of time during which this “father of Florentine history” is our main and well-nigh our only guide. But the inference would be a very unjust one. Strange as it may appear, the writer of the above and of many pages of similar puerilities becomes a valuable and trustworthy historian when he reaches the times near his own; and an eloquent and often deeply politic one when he comes to the story of his own day. Style, treatment, method is all changed. And yet there are abundant grounds for certainty that the early chapters were written, as we read them, by the historian’s hand. I doubt, however, if they were composed by him. For when we come to the next\* in that illustrious line of historians, Giovanni Villani, who began to write in 1300, and brought

\* The next but one, rather; for the history of Dino Compagni runs from 1260 to 1312.

his history down to 1348, and whose work during that period deserves, to a yet higher degree than that of Malispini, the character of sagacious political history, we find not only that he begins his work with a similar farrago of fables, mixing up scraps of sacred and profane history and mythology with the most wonderful disregard of all chronology or consistency ; but that the greater part of this section of his work is copied word for word by whole pages at a time from his predecessor, Malispini ! This remarkable fact seems to me to point very clearly to the conclusion that the early chapters of these ancient chroniclers were not the composition of either of them. As Villani copied from Malispini, so the latter copied what he found in the manuscripts of some previous writer. The real object with either writer in taking his pen in hand was to chronicle the events of his own time. All the preceding matter was taken as found in preceding writings, and prefixed merely with a view of giving what was thought to be a greater completeness to the work.

Several of the fragments of ancient narratives thus introduced by Malispini remind the reader irresistibly of those lines in that well-known passage in which Dante contrasts the “good old times” in Florence with his own. Speaking of the Florentine dames, he says :—

“L’ altra traendo alla rocca la chioma  
Favoleggiava con la sua famiglia  
De’ Troiani, di Fiesole, e di Roma.” \*

They are exactly these old tales of Troy, of Fiesole, and of Rome, mingled just as the poet mingles them in his verse, which were current in the households of Florence, and which the annalist took just as he found them.

\* *Paridiso*, cant. 15, v. 124.

“Another, with her maidens drawing off  
The tresses from the distaff, lectured them  
Old tales of Troy, and Fiesole, and Rome.”—CARY.



One or two of the episodes thus introduced, without the slightest attempt at any connection with what has gone before or with what has to follow, would tempt me, were they less prolix, to extract them as specimens of those old tales which Dante remembered, and of the real character of this early part of these old chronicles. One long story especially, of a queen of whom Catiline was enamoured at Fiesole, and of her beautiful daughter, who was kept by a centurion concealed in his palace in that city; and of the trick by means of which he contrived to carry the girl off on the crupper of his horse, when at last her mother had discovered her, is written so exactly in the style and manner of the earliest romances, that the reader of it can feel no doubt as to the nature of its origin.

Then we have, "How Julius Cæsar besieged Fiesole during eight years and a half; and how he took it, and Catiline fled, and was discomfited on the spot where Pistoia now stands." On which it may be observed, that there is ground for believing that the final defeat of Catiline did really take place on the banks of the Ombrone, about three or four miles to the north of Pistoia;—a circumstance to which is doubtless to be attributed the prominent part assigned to Catiline in all these early Florentine legends. Then we are told how those who survived the battle in which Catiline was defeated, "returned and built a city to which they gave the name of Pistoia, because of the extraordinary great mortality and pestilence (*pistolenzia*) which had been there; and how five hundred years afterwards a noble and powerful man, whose name was Attila, Flagellum Dei, came with 20,000 men to rebuild the city of Fiesole, and to destroy Florence, because of the injury which had been done to Catiline."

The fragmentary nature of these collected scraps of ancient legends is still further shown by the way in which the same ground is often gone over again in a subsequent

chapter, without any apparent consciousness on the part of the author that he is repeating himself. Thus, after a long and minute account of the slaughter committed by Attila at Florence, we are taken back once more to Catiline and his son Hubert, who, "being suspected by the Emperor Octavian, was sent by him into Saxony, where he became the ancestor of the Othos." And then, after several curious chapters, in which the first establishment of several of the earliest of the great Florentine families is recorded, we again go over all the story of the destruction of Florence by Attila, who "was bald, and had ears like a dog, and destroyed many castles and cities in Tuscany, and Lombardy, and Romagna; and then, when he went out from Fiesole, which he had rebuilt, he went into the Maremma, and there died and ended his days."

Gradually the notices acquire a character of greater authenticity and consistency; and the account which the author gives of the destruction of Fiesole by the Florentines in 1010, has been very generally accepted as a narrative of true facts, and admitted by subsequent historians. Nevertheless, there seems great reason to doubt whether the record rests on any better ground than the tradition of some very much less important quarrel between the two cities, such as we may well believe to have occurred more than once between such near neighbours.

Then we are told how Charlemagne came to Florence, and made many knights there; and there is a long account of the families established in Florence after the destruction of Fiesole, and of the exact situation of their dwellings in the city, which is interesting to genealogical antiquaries, and would be much more so, were it not certain that the manuscript copies of the chronicle have been tampered with by persons who were anxious to show that the antiquity of their families was thus vouched for.

Coming down at length to the time of the "Great



Countess" Matilda, we are landed on tolerably firm ground. But the reader generally acquainted with the annals of Europe, who has been accustomed to consider the reign of the great Countess of Tuscany an important epoch in mediæval history, is surprised to find how little she has to do with the history of Florence.

"The said Henry—the third Emperor of that name—had much war with the Countess Matilda, who was devoted to the Holy Church, and defeated him."

"Henry IV., after much fighting with the Church, was again conquered in battle by the Countess Matilda."

"In this year (1115) died the Countess Matilda."

This is the extent of all that Malispini, writing the history of Florence, finds occasion to tell us of "the Great Countess."

Villani speaks of her not much more at length.

"In these days (1070) lived the powerful and wise Countess Matilda, who reigned in Tuscany and Lombardy, and was lady (*donna*) of nearly the whole of it. She did many great things in her time for the Holy Church, so that it seems reasonable and proper to speak of the beginning of her power in this our treatise, since she is much mixed up with the facts of our city of Florence, by the consequences which followed from her deeds in Tuscany."

The promised account of the Countess, however, turns out to be a merely legendary story of her lineage, and the marriage of her mother against the will of that mother's father, the Emperor of Constantinople;—of the foundation of the castle of Canossa;—of Matilda's marriage with Guelph\* of Suabia, and her divorce, with a minute account of the causes and manner of it; of her general devotion to the Church, and her death in 1115. And this is all that Villani has to tell us of the Countess.

\* It is curious that Villani seems wholly ignorant of her first marriage.

No doubt the accounts of the two Florentine historians are thus meagre, only because they had no access to the authentic sources of information\* which exist, and on which subsequent historians have based their narratives. But if Matilda had really exercised much immediate influence on the rising fortunes of Florence, information respecting her would not have been so scarce and unattainable in that city little more than a hundred years after her death. And the fact really important to our history is, that she had so little to do directly with the internal affairs of the rapidly rising Commonwealth. She was Countess of Tuscany; and exercised very considerable influence on the history of Italy and of Europe as such. And yet so little trace remains of any action exercised by her on the city of Florence, that she can hardly be considered to have been the sovereign of that community in any such sense as we now attach to the term. And this position of things, so anomalous to our modern ideas, is an apt illustration of that condition of society which rendered the rise and rapid growth of the Communes possible.

Matilda was arming her vassals, marching hither and thither, or shutting herself up in her fortresses, building monasteries, and holding high counsel with monks and popes, while Florence was quietly growing, and learning to manage its own affairs. In fact such memorials, material or traditional, of the great Countess, as may be met with in Italy, must be sought rather in the Modenese district than within the present limits of Tuscany. Between her and Florence the connection must have been very small; and her immediate and direct influence on its fortunes can have been but slight.

\* The chief of these is the very curious life of Matilda, in Latin hexameters, by the Benedictine monk, Donizo, who, there is reason to believe, was her chaplain. It is printed in the 5th vol. of Muratori's Script. Rerum Ital.

Her immediate and direct influence, I have said. For the great work of her life,—the supporting and increasing the power of the Papacy in opposition to that of the Empire,—had, of course, as may be gathered from what has been said in the earlier part of this chapter, as to the shaping causes of the social condition under which the Communes came into existence and throve,—a very important indirect bearing on the future destinies of the greatest and most vigorous among them.

And in the enthusiasm for historical investigation, which has within the last twenty years characterised in so marked a manner the tendency of Italian thought and culture, the place held by the Countess Matilda in the history of Italy and of Europe has by no means been neglected. It is for the second time a Benedictine monk who has done the most and the best for the great Countess. As the fullest and most authentic account of the facts of her career is furnished us by Donizo, the eleventh-century monk of Canossa, so the best estimate of the significance of her life is supplied by the nineteenth-century monk, Father Tosti, of Montecassino.

During more than a thousand years in Europe the safest and well-nigh the only path to a favourable position in the opinion of posterity was to stand well with the Church. And at the time when Matilda lived, to found a Benedictine monastery was of all possible deeds that which most securely assured a first-class niche in the temple of history. So excellent an investment was it, that, as we see, the virtue of it is not even yet quite spent. Father Tosti, however, though every inch a monk, and a sufficiently good churchman, it may be believed, to have merited the approbation of Gregory VII., is yet so liberal a man as to be in disgrace with the present court of Rome. Of course some abatement must be made from a Benedictine monk's estimate of the foundress of many monasteries and the



great endower of the Church. But as regards the main and most important mooted point respecting the scope and work of Matilda and her great ally and coadjutor, Hildebrand, I think that he is right.

The interesting question as to that strangely matched pair of loving friends, is in fact this. Were they Italian patriots; or merely rulers intent on securing their own position, and governing to as good purpose as they might the populations subjected to them? Had Gregory and Matilda conceived any idea of Italian unity, Italian greatness, and Italian regeneration? Father Tosti thinks, rightly, in my opinion, that they had not. Gregory, and in Father Tosti's opinion, Matilda also, as a worthy help-mate working with him, was humanitarian rather than Italian. The world around him was out of joint.

“His soul was sick with every day's report  
Of wrong and outrage, with which earth was filled.”

To Hildebrand's cosmic mind, disorder, material as well as moral, was hateful. And he sought to bring order into the chaos of moral and material evil around him, by the only means which appeared available for the purpose, and which it was by the conditions of the time and of his education possible for him to conceive;—by the establishment, that is, of a universal, a vigorous, and a righteous theocracy. Of course such personal motives, warpings, and bias as, it may well be thought, humanity is never free from, mingled in the woof of his conduct. But I believe that Hildebrand conscientiously and, regard being had to the conditions of the time, not wholly unreasonably, considered himself to be doing the true work of God's vicar on earth towards humanity.

I am not, however, disposed to believe with Father Tosti, that Matilda can claim the high position of Hildebrand's yoke-fellow, consciously striving with him for the



same great ends, and walking towards them in any degree *pari passu*. She may be said to have been born to an inheritance of inevitable hostility towards the Emperor, which in the then state of Europe, and in her position especially, was equivalent to equally inevitable alliance with the Church. It is extremely probable that she also may have been painfully conscious of the deplorable condition of the world around her, and of its wide divergence from even such an ideal as the best minds of that time were able to form for themselves; and that she may have been sincerely anxious to do all that lay in her power towards forwarding it on the only path of improvement which her lights made it possible for her to be able to conceive. But bearing in mind all that is known of the facts of her career, duly considering the nature and circumstances of her two remarkable marriages,\* and drawing thence conclusions for which our knowledge of woman's nature must form the other premiss, and observing the closeness of her intimacy with Churchmen during her entire life, and in an especial degree with Hildebrand, I am disposed to believe that Matilda was one of those women, the defects as well as the good qualities of whose nature, corresponding with curious infelicity to the defects as well as to the good qualities of the ecclesiastical character, render them the devoted pupils and docile instruments of some priestly friend.

But whatever may be the judgment which we are led to form of the character and motives of the great Countess,

\* Her first marriage in 1069, when she was in her twenty-third year, was with the hunchback, Geoffrey of Lorraine. The second was when she was in her forty-third year, with Guelph of Bavaria, whom nature had disqualified from forming any such tie. Much earlier in her widowhood she had refused the hand of Robert of Normandy. Both these marriages were evidently only political alliances, and were made under the tutelage of the Popes. Of course no issue by either interfered with the legacy of her states to the Church, made long previously to the second marriage.

this at least is certain, that it was due to her favour and devotion to the Holy See that the Church was enabled to maintain the position it assumed in hostility to the Emperors during her life, and due to her munificent bequest that it was strong enough to maintain the contest on no unequal terms for many a generation after her death ;— and that she must be therefore considered as one of the most influential agents in producing that state of things in Italy which rendered possible the rise and rapid growth of the *Comuni*, and especially of that greatest among them, the beginning of whose history as an independent self-subsisting Commonwealth I have ventured to fix a few years before Matilda's death.

# BOOK I.

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FROM THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE COMMUNE, A.D. 1107,

TO

THE BATTLE OF MONTAPERTI, A.D. 1260.

153 YEARS.





## CHAPTER I.

Dante's good old times—Mixture of races in Florence—No Tuscan nation existed in mediæval Italy—Dante's description of the simplicity of manners in old Florence—Villani on the same subject—The first walls—The second walls—Population of Florence in early times—Government of the city in the earliest period—Political constitution—Expeditions of the Florentines against the feudal nobles of surrounding country—Monte Orlando—Expedition against Prato—The Emperor Henry IV.—Imperial Vicar at Sanminiato—Vicar killed by the Florentines—Relations between Florence and the Empire—War between Pisa and Lucca—Florentines guard Pisa—Porphyry columns given by Pisa to Florence—Great fires in Florence—Scantiness of early Florentine history—Pisan estimate of Florence in the twelfth century—Expedition against Monte Boni—Buonaparte family—War with the Counts Guidi—with Arezzo—with Siena.

DANTE, living in that envied thirteenth century\* on which subsequent generations in Florence looked back with admiration and regret, deeming it the veritable golden age, turns away his eyes from the miseries around him, and finds that ever-shifting, never-nearing period, in the good old time some two hundred years before his own. It is but a poor spirit, which in any age yet known to man has been so contented with the world around it, as to form no nobler ideal of the condition of humanity. And the glory which to every man in his declining years shines about the bright morning time of his life, and the unreasoned remembrance of the impressions of greatness and grandeur made on our childish minds by all around them,—impressions

\* Born A.D. 1265.

by comparison with which our later experiences of much greater things are dwarfed,—all tend to lead men into the fallacy of looking for that nobler ideal in the past. It would seem to be one of the latest teachings of human experience, which bids us seek the realisation of our aspirations rather in the future.

Instead of doubting not that—

“ thro’ the ages one increasing purpose runs,  
And the thoughts of men are widen’d with the process of the suns,”

Dante looks backward, and sees only degeneration, not progress, in all that happened to his beloved Florence in the two centuries preceding his birth. In 1078, it was found necessary to enlarge the circuit of the city walls; and the Florentines appointed a committee of citizens\* to superintend the execution of the work. The fact is one among several unmistakeably marking a state of progress and prosperity.† But it was in Dante’s opinion the beginning and first root of those troubles which caused all the evil he saw around him, and made the sorrow and misery of his own life.

It was in that fondly fancied good old time, before the size of the city had been thus increased, when—

“ Tutti color’ eh’ a quel tempo eran ivi  
Da portar arme, tra Marte e’ l Batista  
Erano ’l quinto di quei che son vivi,”‡

\* Marchionne di Coppo<sup>m</sup> Stefani, *Istoria Fiorentina*, printed in the “*Delizie degli Eruditi Toscani*,” vols. vii.—xvii. See vol. vii. p. 52.

† This enlargement of the city is called by the old chroniclers the *second* circle of walls. But certain modern antiquarians, having with more or less certainty discovered traces of an old wall of a yet earlier period than that which the old historians considered the first, have chosen to call this enlargement of 1078 the *third* wall. To prevent any confusion, it is sufficient to observe that the enlargement of 1078 includes the church of St. Lorenzo.

‡ “All those who were there, fit to bear arms, from the statue of Mars to the church of St. John the Baptist, were only a fifth part of the population now existing in the same space.”—*Paradiso*, cant. xvi.

that the population was unmixed with those "foreign" elements which, in the poet's opinion, were the cause of the subsequent dissensions resulting in so much misery.

In those days, says the poet,

" La cittadinanza, ch' è' or mista  
Di Campi, e di Certaldo, e di Figghine  
Pura vedeasi nell' ultimo artista.  
O quanto fora meglio esser vicine  
Quelle genti, ch' io dico ; ed al Galluzzo  
E a Trespiano aver confine,  
Che averle dentro ! " \*

The strangers, who are thus supposed by the mixture of their blood with that of the original inhabitants of Florence to have engendered the enmities which distracted the city in subsequent centuries, were the inhabitants of townlets some ten or twenty miles from Florence ; and the places at which the poet would have wished to draw the frontier line between his Florentines and foreigners, are villages three or four miles from the city walls ! The opinion, that the dissensions and party spirit which lacerated Florence with a ferocity and bitterness unmatched by any other community recorded by history, were to be traced to this early mixing with the people of the neighbouring country, especially those of Fiesole, was held also by Villani the historian†, writing about the same time as Dante. But it is impossible to accept such a circumstance as a sufficient cause for the result attributed to it. A careful study of the record of these civil discords discovers no traces of the operation of any such cause ; but does discover abundance of other perfectly intelligible causes for the result. Nevertheless, the existence of such an opinion or prejudice in the

\* " The blood of the city population, which is now mixed with that of Campi and Certaldo, and Figghine, was then seen pure even in the lowest artisan. Oh ! how much better it had been to have those people I have named for our neighbours, with our boundaries at Galluzzo and Trespiano, rather than to have them within our confines ! " —Paradiso, cant. xvi.

† Giovanni Villani, book iv. ch. vii.



minds of such men as Dante and Villani, is a very remarkable fact, curiously indicative, at all events, of the singular narrowness of that old Italian patriotism, whose *patria* was bounded by a city's walls. It may perhaps also be accepted as showing that jealousies and hatreds between family and family were wont to avail themselves of the so-called purity of Florentine descent, or the reverse, as an element capable of contributing, even at the opening of the fourteenth century, an additional bitterness to enmities mainly due to other motives.

This narrowness of patriotism, which made each citizen of the old Italian communes feel that his "country" extended at the utmost only to the limits of the territory subject to his native city, and regard all the world beyond as "foreign;" this manner of thinking and feeling, which exercised so permanent an influence on the entire course of Italian history, and which, beginning only now in our own days to disappear before other and better teaching, may still be traced in many a popular mode of speech, furnishes another proof of the self-subsistent independence of the communes from their first rise at the period under consideration. It is clear that the series of Counts, Marquises, and Dukes whose names industrious antiquaries have gathered with difficulty out of ancient documents as rulers over Tuscany during the centuries preceding the eleventh, did not succeed in so welding the country they professed to govern, into any social whole, as to make it in any sense a country to the inhabitants of it. No man dreamed of thinking or calling himself a Tuscan. He was a Pisan, a Lucchese, a Sienese, a Florentine, &c. The city was the only social and political integer he knew. Nor can the slightest trace be found of any connection or common interest or feeling between one city and another, arising from the community of their allegiance to any of these sovereigns.



The well known and beautiful passage in which Dante describes the simplicity of life in Florence at the period immediately preceding the building of the second walls, will assist us in forming a notion of the young community, just getting strength enough to start on the eventful course through which we are to follow it.

“ Fiorenza dentro alla cerchia antica,\*  
 Ond’ ella toglie ancora e Terza e Nona  
 Si stava in pace sobria e pudica :  
 Non avea catenella, non corona  
 Non donne contigiate, non cintura  
 Che fosse a veder più che la persona :  
 Nor faceva nascendo ancor paura  
 La figlia al padre, che ’l tempo e la dote  
 Non fuggian quinci e quindi la misura :  
 Non avea case di famiglia vote ;  
 Non v’ era giunto ancor Sardanapalo  
 A mostrar ciò che ’n camera si puote :  
 Non era vinto ancora Montemalo  
 Dal vostro Uccellatoio, che com’ è vinto  
 Nel montar su, così sarà nel calo.

\* “ Florence within her ancient circuit of walls, where still hangs the bell that calls to morning and evening prayers, lived in peace soberly and modestly. There were in those days no golden chains nor coronets, nor dames with ornamented sandalled stockings, nor girdles calculated to attract more notice than the wearers of them ; not in those days did the birth of a daughter terrify her father lest he should be called on for an unreasonably large dower at an unreasonably early time of his child’s life. There were no houses void of their inmates perished in civil broil. No Sardanapalus had yet come among us, to show what excesses might be committed in the privacy of citizens’ homes. The hill of Montemalo, (from which a first sight of Rome is caught in journeying southwards), was not yet surpassed in the magnificence of its prospect by the Uccellatoio which overlooks Florence,—surpassed in the growing splendour of the city it looks down on, as it shall also be in the greatness of the fall thereof. I have seen Bellincion Berti in the streets with a leathern girdle fastened with a button of bone, and his wife coming from the glass with no paint upon her face. I have seen too the De Nerli and the Del Vecchio content to be clad in plain leather uncovered with cloth, and their wives busy with the distaff and spindle. Happy they ! and each woman was sure to lay her bones in her own land ; and none went to a widowed bed because her lord was absent trafficking in France.”—Paradiso, cant. xv. ver. 97—120.

Bellincion Berti vid' io andar cinto  
 Di cuoio e d'osso; e venir dallo specchio  
 La Donna sua sanza 'l viso dipinto :  
 E vidi quel de' Nerli, e quel del Vecchio  
 Esser contenti alla pelle seoverta  
 E le sue donne al fuso ed al pennecchio.  
 O fortunate ! e ciascuna era certa  
 Dello sua sepoltura, ed ancor nulla  
 Era per Francia nel letto deserta."

If we hesitate to receive the inference drawn by the poet from this simplicity of manners, as to the degree of virtue and happiness which must be held to have accompanied them, we may still accept the picture as a faithful presentation of the social condition of Florence, when she was on the point of starting on her career of power, wealth, and prosperity. For the poet's account is confirmed with singular exactitude of agreement by the historian Villani, who, however, has copied the passage almost word for word from the 164th chapter of the work of Malispini. "In those days," writes the former historian, "the citizens of Florence lived soberly, and on coarse food, and at small cost; and as regards many of their modes of life, they were rude and gross. They clothed themselves and their wives with coarse cloth, and many wore skins uncovered by any cloth at all. They used caps on their heads and leathern sandals\* on their feet, and the Florentine women wore stockings without ornament; and those of the highest rank contented themselves with a narrow petticoat of coarse Ypres scarlet, or of

\* The word in the text is "*usatti*." The women did wear "*usatti*;" and did not wear, as Dante tells us, in the passage above quoted, "*contigie*." It would seem that the former were soles of leather fastened to the feet and legs by leather straps, probably very similar to what may now be seen on the feet of the peasants of the Abruzzi. The "*contigie*" were leathern soles sewn on the foot of the stocking, and surrounding the lower part of the foot with a protection of stamped or otherwise ornamental leather, which was no doubt a new fashion, deemed highly elegant, and stigmatised of course by the censors of the day as immoral, and probably immodest sybaritism.

camlet bound round the waist with a girdle, after the ancient fashion, and a mantle lined with minever, with a hood which they wore over their heads. And the women of the people were clothed in coarse green cloth of Cambrai, made after the same fashion. A hundred *lire* \* was an ordinary dower for a wife. A dower of two or three hundred was in those days considered enormous. Girls, for the most part had completed their twentieth year before they were married. Thus rude in dress and customs were the Florentines of those days; but they were loyal, and kept good faith, both among each other and towards the Commonwealth. And with their poverty and coarse mode of life, they did greater things, and acted more virtuously, than we do with our greater effeminacy and greater riches."

Those were the manners of the good old times before the building of the second walls around the increased city. The position of these walls, and the amount of space thus added to the city, are very accurately known. The line taken by the new circuit has been minutely recorded by Malispini,† Villani,‡ and Coppo Stefani.§ But it will be sufficient for our purpose to indicate in a more general manner the extent of the increase.

The old city, wholly confined to the northern bank of the river, stretched along it from a point near the present Ponte Santa Trinità, to another a little beyond the building of the Uffizi. A line drawn northward from the foot of the Ponte Santa Trinità, to the corner formed by the Via de' Rondinelli and the Via de' Cerretani, and thence turning at a sharp angle westward, proceeding then in a direct line to the Piazza del Duomo, encircling the Cathedral, and then turning southwards to rejoin the river by a line nearly correspond-

\* The Tuscan lira is now equal to eightpence sterling. To find its equivalent value at the time in question it must be multiplied by from ten to fifteen.

† Chap. lxi.

‡ Book iv. chap. viii.

§ Book i. rubr. xxxiv.



ing with the present *Via del Proconsolo*, the *Piazza di San Firenze*, and the *Via de' Leoni*, would very nearly mark the position of the old wall. The new one, built in 1078, enclosed an area much more than twice as large as the old city. This new wall extended along the northern bank of the river from the present Ponte alle Grazie to the Ponte alla Carraia. A direct line drawn in north-western direction from the foot of the latter, to the sharp corner made by the *Via delle Cantonelle*, behind the Church of St. Lorenzo, turning at that corner to follow in a south-easterly direction, and nearly in a straight line, the course of the streets *De' Gori*, *Calderai*, *De' Pucci*, *De' Cresci*, and *St. Egidio*, to the corner of the *Via del Fosso*, and there again turning to the south-west, and striking towards the river in a direct line by the streets *Del Diluvio* and *De' Benci*, to the foot of the *Ponte alle Grazie*, would form the new boundary of the city on the northern bank of the river. But the suburbs which had been gradually formed on the southern bank, were also now for the first time brought within the walled city. This new "*Oltrarno*" quarter, "beyond the Arno," comprising less than a quarter of the space now occupied by the city on the southern bank, was bounded by the river from the *Ponte Santa Trinitá*, nearly to the *Ponte alle Grazie*, and by a line of wall which, starting from the bank at the spot where the former of these bridges now stands, followed the entire length of the present *Via Maggio*, and then turning at an acute angle back again towards the river, crossed the *Piazza de' Pitti* in an oblique direction, so as to exclude the ground on which the Pitti Palace now stands, pursued an irregular course along the foot of the steep hill, which here leaves but a narrow space between it and the Arno, till it rejoined that river in the immediate neighbourhood of the *Ponte alle Grazie*.

It will be seen that this notable enlargement of the city,



while more than doubling its former area, comprised a space less than a fourth of that contained within the present wall, which third circuit was, in most respects as it still remains, traced in the year 1285.

What was the population of Florence at the time of which we are now speaking, the beginning of the twelfth century, some five-and-twenty years after the building of the second walls, when the history of the city, as an independent Commonwealth, was just beginning? It were much to be wished that a satisfactory answer could be given to this question; but we are absolutely without any direct information on the point. More than two other centuries must elapse before we reach any tolerably trustworthy facts on this subject. The absence of all attempt to obtain any correct knowledge on a subject of such paramount importance to the prosperity of their city, is a singular trait in the character of those old fathers of the Commonwealth; more especially as the means of very accurate information were in their hands. From the earliest period every child born in Florence was baptised at one and the same font,—that of the Baptistery, or Church of San Giovanni. It seems almost inconceivable that no register or enumeration of these baptisms should have been kept. Yet such was the case till the year 1450, from which time till the present, the registry is complete. Villani,\* however, supplies us with an estimate founded on reliable data about the year 1338. The population within the walls, exclusive of foreigners, travellers, soldiers, monks, and nuns, was estimated to be at that time ninety thousand; and the addition of the above excepted classes would probably bring up the total to a hundred thousand souls. And though, as has been said, no register was ever kept at the Baptistery till long afterwards, the historian

\* Book xi. chap. xciv.

found, he tells us, that about that same time the priest of San Giovanni, being curious to know the number of infants on whom he was required to perform his function, was in the habit of putting into a vessel a black bean for every boy and a white one for every girl he baptized; and that the number was thus ascertained to be from 5800 to 6000 yearly: the male births exceeding the female by about 400—a curious and anomalous fact, confirmed by the results of recent more scientific observation in Tuscany. With regard, however, to the proportion between the births thus recorded by the priest of St. John's black and white beans, and Villani's estimate of the population, it may be remarked that in all probability the baptisms at the Baptistery included a certain number belonging to the suburban population.

To the facts thus established respecting an epoch about two hundred and thirty years subsequent to our starting-point at the beginning of the twelfth century, it may be added, that from the building of the second walls in 1078, the increase of the population is known to have been very rapid. The whole space between the first and second walls is recorded to have become thickly inhabited very quickly; and about half a century before the date of Villani's estimate it had become necessary, as we have seen, to increase the city a second time. There is further an assertion by Villani, that Florence contained "twenty-two thousand fighting men, without counting the old men and children," about the middle of the sixth \* century; and modern statisticians have based on this statement an estimate which would make the population of the city at that period about sixty-one thousand.† There are reasons too for believing that very little difference in the popula-

\* Villani, book ii. chap. i.

† *Ricerche Statistiche sul Gran Ducato di Toscana*, da Attilio Zuccagni,—Orlandini, vol. i. Florence, 1848.

tion took place during several centuries after that time.\* Then came the sudden increase arising from the destruction, more or less entire, of Fiesole, and the incorporation of its inhabitants with those of the newer city, which led to the building of the second walls.

There was therefore at the beginning of the twelfth century a "large increase," on sixty-one thousand. But subsequently to the twelfth century a further "very large increase" led to the building of the third walls in 1285; and brought the population up to a hundred thousand in 1338. We have, therefore, two large increases of the population to bring it from the sixty-one to the hundred thousand. And the beginning of the twelfth century came after the first of these, and before the second, but much nearer in time to the former epoch. We may perhaps therefore, basing our guess on all these circumstances, consider that an estimate taking the inhabitants of the city at something between seventy and eighty thousand at the period respecting which we are inquiring would in all probability be not very wide of the mark.

The government of the city was at that time lodged in the hands of magistrates exercising both legislative and administrative authority, called Consuls, assisted by a senate composed of a hundred citizens of worth—*buoni uomini*.† These Consuls "guided everything, and governed the city, and decided causes, and administered ‡ justice." They remained in office for one year. How long this form of government had been established in Florence is uncertain. It was not in existence in the year 897§; but it was in activity in 1102§. From 1138 we

\* Orlandini, *op. cit.*, v. v. i. p. 401.

† Villani, book v. chap. ix.

‡ *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

§ Lami, *Memorab. Eccles. Florent*, tom. i. p. 392.

§ Ammirato, the younger. Additions to the first book of Ammirato, the elder's, *Florentine History*.



have a nearly complete roll of the names of the consuls for each year down to 1219, from which it appears that the number of these magistrates varied from four to twenty, unless indeed some of the names given may be supposed to be those of members of the Senate or Council. Villani \* says that when the city was divided into four "Quartieri," as was the case previous to the enlargement of the walls in 1078, there were four Consuls; and when subsequently to that enlargement, a new division into six "Sestieri" was adopted, six of those magistrates were created, one for each ward of the city. "But," he adds, "our fathers used not to make mention of all the names, but of some one among them of the highest reputation and social position, saying, 'in the time of such and such a Consul *and his colleagues.*'" Such a practice of itself denotes a degree of laxity and uncertainty which will be found to characterise almost every Florentine institution to a singular degree. Law and statutory provisions never seem to have been strong and stiff enough to resist the over-riding force of passion and strong individual will. That law should find its ultimate and fundamental sanction in the will of the society to be ruled by it, is well. But there is danger in such a direct and immediate influence of the masses of the society on the work of legislation as shall breed in the mind of every man the habitual notion that the setting aside of law is an easy, simple, and every-day matter; and that it is very competent to him to take steps towards abrogating regulations of which he himself or his father had had a large share in the making. The want of stability arising from such habits of thought marks the whole course of Florentine history; and assuredly the tale to be told will show that in such a constitution of society there is danger.

No doubt the statement of Villani as to the number of

\* Book 7. chap. xxxii.

the Consuls represents accurately the normal state of the matter; and the exceptions to it were abnormal cases of law being over-ridden. But these exceptional cases were of such frequent occurrence, that the learned antiquary Lami remarks \* on the foregoing passage of Villani, that “no faith is to be placed in his statement on the subject,” inasmuch as there were sometimes eight and sometimes as many as eleven Consuls.†

The first recorded deeds of the young community thus governed, and beginning to feel conscious and proud of its increasing strength, were characteristic enough of the tone of opinion and sentiment which prevailed within its walls, and of the career on which it was entering.

“In the year 1107,” says Malispini,‡ “the city of Florence being much increased, the Florentines, wishing to extend their territory, determined to make war against any castle or fortress which would not be obedient to them. And in that year they took by force Monte Orlando, which belonged to certain gentlemen who would not be obedient to the city. And they were defeated, and the castle was destroyed.”

These “gentlemen,” so styled by the civic historian who thus curtly records the destruction of their home, in contradistinction to the citizens who by no means considered themselves such, were the descendants or representatives of those knights and captains, mostly of German race, to whom the Emperors had made grants of the soil according to the feudal practice and system. They held directly of the Empire, and in no wise owed allegiance or obedience of any sort to the community of Florence. But they occu-

\* *Loc. cit.*

† He might have said as many as twenty, according to the lists given in Padre Ildenfonso di San Luigi's illustrations to Coppo Stefani's history, “*Delizie degli Eruditi Toscani*,” vol. vii. p. 139.

‡ Chap. lxxv.

A.D.  
1107. pied almost all the country around the rising city; and the citizens "wanted to extend their territory." Besides, these territorial lords were, as has been said, gentlemen, and lived as such, stopping wayfarers on the highways, levying tolls in the neighbourhood of their strongholds, and in many ways making themselves disagreeable neighbours to peaceable folks. The lords of Monte Orlando, moreover, who were certain Counts Cadolingi,\* were established in a spot which, above all others, the burghers of Florence could not permit to remain in the hands of people with genteel habits. Monte Orlando was situated close to the present village of Signa, just at the spot, about seven miles from Florence, where the Arno, quitting the wide basin in which the city is situated, enters a rocky gorge in the hills, through which it passes on its way to the lower Valdarno. It was impossible for a gentleman of the twelfth century to find a spot possessing more absolute adaptation to the habitudes of his class. The course of the navigable river, and that of the high road to the great and wealthy city of Pisa,—a town of far greater importance than Florence at that period,—was in the hands of the owners of Monte Orlando. It was true that the Counts Cadolingi held their fief of the Emperor, and the Emperor held the empire by the grace of God. The Florentines by no means denied either proposition; but they wanted room to grow;—and especially would not have the way to Pisa stopped. So these men in the leathern jerkins, with bone-buttoned girdles, and with sandals on their feet, obeyed manifest destiny, and starting forth from their city one fine morning, unhoused the noble Cadolingi, and knocked their stronghold to ruins before they returned in the evening.

The next incident on the record, however, would seem

\* Repetti, *Dizionario Geografico, Fisiologico, Storico della Toscana*. vol iii. p. 452.



to show that peaceful townsfolk as well as marauding nobles were liable to be overrun by the car of manifest destiny, if they came in the way of it. A.D.  
1111.

“In the same year,” says the curt old historian, “the men of Prato rebelled against the Florentines; wherefore they went out in battle against it, and took it by siege and destroyed it.”

Prato rebelled against Florence! It is a very singular statement; for there is not the shadow of a pretence put forward, or the smallest ground for imagining that Florence had or could have claimed any sort of suzerainty over Prato, now a flourishing little city, twelve miles from the capital on the way to Pistoia, but then a recently formed settlement of a small community which had bought their independence “with their own money” from the counts Guidi. These poor vassals of the Counts Guidi had lived on their land in the immediate neighbourhood of Montemurlo, a spot about three or four miles from Prato; but having bought their freedom, came to the place where that city now stands, because it was “free territory;” and there they bought the meadow, which has given its name to the town they built on it. It can hardly be but that the “rebellion” of these poor people against Florence was of the nature of the lamb’s offence against the wolf.

The territorial nobles, however, who held castles in the district around Florence were the principal objects of the early prowess of the citizens; and of course offence against them was offence against the Emperor. And Henry IV. having in the year 1111 succeeded to his father, and partly by fraud and partly by force, caused himself to be crowned in Rome by Pascal II.—a very different sort of adversary to deal with from Gregory VII.—the imperial power became for the nonce a somewhat more real and less shadowy thing in Italy, as was usually the case when the Emperors crossed the Alps, and appeared in person among

A.D.  
1113. their theoretically submissive southern subjects. In 1113, accordingly, we find an Imperial vicar residing in Tuscany at St. Miniato; not the convent-topped hill of that name in the immediate neighbourhood of Florence, but a little mountain city of the same name, overlooking the lower Valdarno, about half way between Florence and Pisa. This strong position was the usual station of the Imperial Vicars in Tuscany; and from that circumstance the city is called to the present day San Miniato al Tedesco,—San Miniato of the Germans. It stands high on the crest of its hill, in a very imperial sort of position, and still attracts the attention of travellers, who are whirled along at the base of the mountain on the railway from Leghorn to Florence, by the tall slender brick tower, sole remaining fragment of the castle built there by Frederick II. Several of the Emperors when in Italy resided and dated diplomas from this German San Miniato. And there the Imperial Vicars perched themselves hawk-like, with their Imperial troops, and swooped down from time to time to chastise and bring back such cities of the plain as too audaciously set at naught the authority of the Emperor.

And really these upstart Florentines were taking the bit between their teeth, and going on in a way that no Imperial Vicar could tolerate; especially when his master had just been crowned at Rome, and had by hook or by crook patched up for the nonce a peace with the Holy Father. So the indignant cry of the harried Counts Cadolingi, and of several other nobles holding of the Empire, whose houses had been burned over their heads by these audacious citizens, went up to the ears of "Messer Ruberto," the Vicar, in San Miniato. Whereupon that noble knight, indignant at the wrong done to his fellow nobles, as well as at the offence against the authority of his master the Emperor, forthwith put lance in rest, called out his men, and descended from his

A.D.  
1113.

mountain fortress to take summary vengeance on the audacious city. On his way thither he had to pass through that very gorge where the castle of Monte Orlando had stood, and under the ruins of the house from which the noble vassals of the Empire had been harried. The spot is not quite half way from Florence to San Miniato; but the Florentines were minded to save the Imperial Vicar and his troops the rest of their march. There were the leathern-jerkined citizens on the very scene of their late misdeed, come out to oppose the further progress of the Emperor's Vicar and his soldiers. And there, as the historian writes, with curiously impassible brevity, "the said Messer Ruberto was discomfited and killed." \* And nothing further is heard of him, or of any after consequences resulting from the deed.

Learned legal antiquaries insist much on the fact, that the independence of Florence and the other Communes was never "recognised" by the Emperors; and they are no doubt perfectly accurate in saying so. One would think, however, that that unlucky Vicar of theirs, Messer Ruberto, must have "recognised" the fact, though somewhat tardily. As for the old historians of the city, they content themselves with very simply narrating such circumstances as the above, appearing to consider them quite sufficiently accounted for by such phrases as, "the Florentines being desirous of extending their boundaries;" or "the citizens being minded to exercise lordship over the country around them;" or "the city finding that such and such nobles of the Empire would not be obedient;" or the like; writing their *de facto* chronicles with an innocent disregard of any *de jure* considerations, which might well excite the indignation of feudal jurists.

It was in the year 1113 that this defeat of the Imperial

\* Malispini, chap. lxix.; Villani, book iv. chap. xxix.; Coppo Stefani, book i. rubr. xxxix.



A.D.  
1114. forces by the citizens took place; and the following year was marked by an event yet more significant of the absolute practical independence of the larger Communes.

The earliest notices we have of wars waged by one city against another, date from more than one hundred years previous to the time of which we are speaking; the earliest case on record\* being that of a war between Pisa and Lucca, both considerably older cities than Florence, in 1004. It is impossible to imagine any act of a community more decisively proving its sovereignty and independence, than that of declaring war and making peace with other social bodies. And from this time forth the history of Italy mainly consists of the accounts of warfare between one commune and another. War between Lucca and Pisa had, as has been seen, long preceded the year 1114. In that year the Pisans undertook an expedition against the Balearic Isles, then held by the Saracens. They had made great preparations; and were on the point of embarking on board their fleet, when they heard that the Lucchese were planning an attack on their city as soon as the Pisan forces should have fairly started on their expedition. The Pisans, in this difficulty, being extremely unwilling to relinquish the enterprise, for which they had made such preparation, hit on the expedient of asking the Florentines, with whom they had always hitherto been on good terms, to come and guard their city for them while they were absent on the expedition against the Saracens.

The Florentines at once consented; and sent an army to mount guard over Pisa, which seems to have proved a perfectly sufficient protection; for nothing further is heard of any attack by the Lucchese. But an anecdote has been preserved in connection with this friendly service, which illustrates curiously the manners and sentiments of the

\* Pignotti, *Storia della Toscana*, book iii. chap. i.

period. All the fighting men having gone on the expedition against the Saracens, Pisa remained with no inhabitants save the old men, women, and children. Under these circumstances, the Florentines felt that it would be more delicate on their part, and more considerate towards the reputation of the Pisan ladies, if they abstained from entering the city. They mounted guard accordingly, camped outside the walls; and strictly forbade any one of their people from entering the city gate. It so happened, however, that one Florentine, "peeping Tom," was caught—on what errand is not stated—inside the city, and was thereupon summarily condemned to be hung. The Pisans, however—the Pisan ladies we must suppose—warmly interceded with the Florentine commander for his pardon, but all in vain. Wherefore, with a view of saving the poor fellow, the city of Pisa formally forbade any execution taking place on their territory. But the Florentine general was determined to maintain the strict discipline of his army. In order, therefore, to do so without infringing the above-mentioned decree of the Pisans, he bargained with the peasant owner of a field near the city (who was ignorant of the purpose for which it was desired) for the purchase of a plot of ground sufficient to erect a gibbet on, and there hung the prisoner; a plan from which the strange inference would seem to follow, that, according to the notions of that day, the private purchase of a piece of ground by one individual from another, might have the effect of withdrawing the land so bought and sold from the dominion of one government, and transferring it to that of another sovereign; a principle which it is impossible to suppose can have been admitted.

A.D.  
1114.

The Pisans, however, we are told, were so much pleased with the entire conduct of the Florentines in this matter, that on their victorious return from their expedition, they offered to present to Florence whichever of the two most

A.D. 1117. notable objects among the spoil taken by them that city might select : a pair of metal gates, or a couple of porphyry columns. The Florentines chose the latter ; and the pillars were forthwith despatched to Florence “covered with scarlet,” and were placed on each side of the western-door of the Baptistery, where they may be seen to this day.\*

The years 1115 and 1117 were marked by two great and very disastrous fires in Florence. Nearly all, say the historians, which was not burned in the first perished in the second conflagration. And both Malispini and Villani specially deplore the destruction of a vast quantity of private and public archives ; “so that a great part of what has been hereinbefore narrated has necessarily been gathered from the annals of other cities,” says Villani. It may be observed, however, that no remarkable improvement is to be found in the pages of either Malispini, Villani, or Coppo Stefani immediately after the date of these calamities. The disjointed notices continue to be as meagre, curt, and scanty as before ; and we have to proceed a long way yet, before the narrative of either of these writers assumes anything like the consistency of history. It may be remarked, also, that such notices as they give of the history of the Popes and Emperors are far more complete, detailed, and satisfactory, than those relating to the proper story<sup>3</sup> of their own community. And this circumstance must be felt to be evidence of the very rude and embryo condition of the Florentine civilization in that twelfth century, to which Dante looked back as the golden age of his country. Those men with the leathern jerkins and the bone buttons

\* Malispini, chap. lxxi. ; Villani, book iv. chap. xxxi. ; Coppo Stefani, book i. rubr. xli. All these historians speak of the alternative offered to the Florentines as “the metal doors,” without further explanation. No doubt these doors or gates were well known to everybody when those authors wrote.



no doubt lived frugally; and their wives may have rocked the cradle, and been diligent with their distaffs: but I do not think that they talked so much of Troy, and Rome, and Fiesole as the poet imagined. The generations which occupy themselves much with the history of their ancestors, are generally diligent recorders of their own. And the leathern-jerkined Florentines were more busied in making history, or at least in the preparation for it, than in writing it. The sentiment of an intense civic patriotism was growing strong among them, in obedience to those same laws of human nature which bind to each other and to their ship the crew which has struggled together in battle and in tempest. In the midst of that troublous anarchic world, they, within their city wall there, were determined to depend on no one but themselves, but to hold their own—and something more—by the might of their own right arms; and with strong instincts towards a better, more rational, and more orderly life than that prevailing in the world around them, were groping their way toward civilization, bent on realising, upholding, and fostering that “*civile vivere*,” that municipal organization of society which they traditionally held to be not only the best, but the only form of fruitful, orderly, and progressive social life. But the high degree of civilization which was to spring so soon and with such wonderful quickness of growth from the foundations which those rough men were preparing for it, can hardly be said to have made its appearance in the world till the institution of the industrial guilds—perhaps the most powerfully organising form of civil arrangement ever yet invented by man—came on the scene to shape the social course in that direction, which decided all its future fortunes.

Some merchants of Pisa, which had already reached a pitch of civilization not attained by Florence for another hundred years to come, trading to Tunis, were asked by

A. D.  
1117.

A.D. 1135. their correspondents there, who and what were a people calling themselves Florentines, of whom they had heard mention recently : " Oh ! " said the Pisans, " they are our Arabs of the interior." And the reply conveys a very sufficient idea of the place held by the young community in the estimation of their wealthy neighbours.

These " Arabs of the interior," meanwhile, in the comparative obscurity of their valley at the foot of the Apennines, were steadily pursuing their upward path, growing unceasingly in size, power, and importance. Already they had pushed the continually receding frontier of their little territory to a much greater distance from their city walls than that to which their great poet, writing some two hundred and fifty years later, would have wished to limit them. And still the work of extension and consolidation went on ; and one after another the strongholds of the old territorial aristocracy were by might rather than by right, as the historian Villani admits, swept out of the way of their progress.

One case of the kind, specially recorded as having occurred in the year 1135,\* merits that special record for a reason which the historians who have narrated it could little have foreseen or imagined.

About four miles to the south of Florence, on an eminence overlooking the valley of the little river Greve, and the then bridle-path leading towards Siena and Rome, there was a very strong castle, called Monte Boni, Mons Boni, as it is styled in sundry deeds of gift executed within its walls in the years 1041, 1085, and 1100, by which its lords made their peace with the Church, in the usual way, by sharing with churchmen the proceeds of a course of life such as needed a whitewashing stroke of the Church's office. A strong castle on the road to Rome, and just at

\* Malispini, chap. lxxiii. ; Villani, book iv. chap. xxxvi. ; Coppo Stefani, book i. rubr. xlii.

a point where the path ascended a steep hill, offered advantages and temptations not to be resisted; and the lords of Monte Boni "took toll" of passengers. But, as Villani very naïvely says, "the Florentines could not endure that another should do what they abstained from doing." So as usual they sallied forth from their gates one fine morning, attacked the strong fortress, and razed it to the ground.

A.D.  
1135.

All this was, as we have seen, an ordinary occurrence enough in the history of young Florence. This was a way the burghers had. They were clearing their land of these vestiges of feudalism, much as an American settler clears his ground of the stumps remaining from the primeval forest. But a special interest will be admitted to belong to this instance of the clearing process, when we discover who those noble old freebooters of Monte Boni were.

The lords of Monte Boni were called, by an easy, but it might be fancied ironical, derivation from the name of their castle, "Buoni del Monte,"—the Good Men of the Mountain;—and by abbreviation, Buondelmonte, a name which we shall hear more of anon in the pages of this history. But when, after the destruction of their fortress, these Good Men of the Mountain became Florentine citizens, they increased and multiplied; and in the next generation, dividing off into two branches, they assumed, as was the frequent practice, two distinctive appellations; the one branch remaining Buondelmonti, and the other calling themselves Buonaparte. This latter branch shortly afterwards again divided itself into two, of which one settled at San Miniato al Tedesco, and became extinct there in the person of an aged canon of the name within this century; while the other first established itself at Sarzana, a little town on the coast about half-way between Florence and Genoa, and from thence at a later period transplanted itself to Corsica; and has since been heard of.



A.D.  
1146. In the twelfth century too, it would seem, that the family produced men who had the gift of comprehending the spirit of their time. For as has been said, the Buondelmonti submitted to the destruction of their castle with a good grace, entered Florence as citizens, and thus succeeded in preserving much of their property.

Many others of the old feudal families submitted to a similar transformation; and some became leading citizens in their new home. The Florentines asked no more of them than this; and having destroyed the strongholds which were the material causes of the evils they were determined to put down, they were always ready to open their gates to those who would come and live within them, submit to law, and make themselves citizens;—a wise moderation, which reminds us of the analogous policy on a larger scale of old Rome.

Nearly, but not quite always, the citizens seem to have been successful in these raids against the castles of the nobles. The first recorded check to the success of their arms occurred in the year 1146; and in fact the young community, in its increasing pride and audacity, continually flew at higher and higher game, and in that year measured its strength against a more powerful adversary than it had hitherto ventured to attack.

Of all the feudatories of the Empire, the Counts Guidi were by far the most powerful in Central Italy. Coming originally from Germany, like almost all the territorial nobles, who at the first glimmering of historical light after the great darkness of the barbarian invasions, are found in possession of the soil of Italy, they seem to have been settled in this part of the peninsula before the year 960.\*

\* A document, bearing date the 14th April in that year, directed by the Marchese Oberto to "his faithful Guido," respecting lands in the immediate vicinity of the castle now attacked by the Florentines, has been preserved.—Repetti, vol. iii. p. 376.

The first seat of their power was the lordship of Modigliana, in Tuscan Romagna, where they waxed powerful, and held sway as sovereign princes, till their tyranny and crimes caused their subjects to rise against them, and put to death the whole family, with the exception of one infant. From this child sprung a new race of Guidi, who became possessed of very large and wide-spread estates in Tuscany; although it would seem, from the document cited in the last note, that the family had also previously possessed estates in this part of Italy. At a later period, the family, having ramified itself into several branches, took different sides in the great party quarrels which separated all Italy into two hostile camps. But although connecting itself with Florentine citizens by marriage, it did not, like the Buondelmonti, become absorbed by the strong assimilating power of the rising Commonwealth.

A.D.  
1146.

One of the principal strongholds of this powerful family was Monte Croce, a castle situated about nine miles from Florence, in the direction of Ponte a Sieve, now a small town on the road to Arezzo. This strong position "seemed to the Florentines," says Villani, "to be much too near their city." No other pretext of quarrel was sought for or pretended: that was deemed a sufficient ground of offence. The feudal jurisdiction of the Count, holding of the Emperor, was in the way of the townsmen; and so they forthwith proceeded to clear the way. But the Guidi were assisted in their defence by all the power of the men of Arezzo, where Imperial sympathies were prevalent. And the Florentines got their first beating.\*

The lesson was probably a severe one, for the citizens remained quietly within their walls for the next eight years. Not that it is to be supposed that there existed at Florence the slightest idea of abandoning their object, but

\* Malispini, chap. lxxii.; Villani, book iv. chap. xxxvii.; Coppo Stefani, book i. rubr. xliii.

A.D.  
1154. that in all probability the city needed a breathing space to recruit its strength. In 1154, after an interval of eight years, the city forces again marched out against Monte Croce ; and this time, after a severe struggle, they took it ; and so destroyed it, says Villani, as not to leave one stone upon another.

Thus far the wars of the new Commonwealth have been with their nearest neighbours only, the territorial nobles holding castles and exercising feudal jurisdiction in the district immediately around the city. It seems strange that these chieftains, whose interests were evidently identical, and whose sympathies and sentiments must have been similar, should have suffered themselves to be thus destroyed in detail by the Florentines, without making any attempt to unite for mutual support against an enemy so manifestly bent on exterminating the whole of them. There is, however, no trace of any such attempt having been made.

But now the course of progressive aggrandizement began to bring the Florentines into collision with other social bodies of their own kind ; and we have reached the period of the first of those wars with neighbouring cities, which make so large a part of all the subsequent history of Florence. Angered by the support which the Arezzo people had given to Count Guidi, “without any valid reason,” as one of the historians\* says, the Florentines marched against them ; and having discomfited them, made peace with them, on promise of future friendly behaviour.

A few years later, in the year 1177, Florence was at war for the first time with Siena. Once more the Commonwealth “wished to extend itself,” and so came to have disputes with the Sienese about some frontier fortresses in the Chianti, a hilly district to the south-west of Florence, at a

\* Coppo Stefani, book i. rubr. xlv.



later period much celebrated for its wines, as readers of Redi will remember. So an opportunity having been offered by a war between Siena and Montepulciano, the Florentines went to the assistance of the latter city, relieved it, and then in a pitched battle with the Sienese forces defeated them in this first fight between the two proud cities, with great loss. A.D.  
1177.

These events mark the commencement of a new phase in the progress of Florentine aggrandizement; and the practice of internecine wars with the neighbouring cities thus inaugurated, makes, as has been said, a large part of the future history of Florence. But it is noteworthy that this same epoch is marked by the first appearance of another feature in Florentine story, which, during the whole remainder of it, plays a still more prominent, and by far more fatally mischievous part, than the wars with other Communes.

In the next chapter we must speak for the first time of civil dissension within the walls.

## CHAPTER II.

Feudal nobles come into the city—Retain the hope of recovering their original position—Overbearing violence of the nobles—The Uberti—Their locality in the city—Civil war between the nobles and the citizens—Great conflagrations in the city—Disastrous floods—Treaty with Lucca—Capitulation with the Alberti—City nobles do not support the territorial nobles—Expeditions against castles in the Valdelsa—Foundation of Poggibonzi—Of Colle—Frederick Barbarossa in Italy—His dealings with Florence—Tuscan league under the protection of the Pope—Florentine ambition—War with Semifonte—Albert of Semifonte—Constitutions granted by feudal nobles—Statute of Valdambra—Remarks on this constitution, by Professor Giudici—These efforts of the feudal nobles unsuccessful.

It was the policy and practice of Florence, as has been seen, to make war on the castles of the nobles settled in the territory around them, rather than on their persons. When the stronghold had been razed to the ground, the owners were permitted, and indeed in some instances compelled, to come and reside within the city walls, and change themselves into citizens. They were for the most part left in possession of their lands, though not of the feudal rights and jurisdiction attached to them. And thus, on becoming members of the city community, being rich, they naturally became leading and powerful citizens in it.

The policy thus pursued by the Florentines was moderate and conciliatory; but it may be doubted whether the results of it did not contribute to those irreconcilable divisions which so often brought the Commonwealth to the brink of ruin. For it was scarcely to be expected that

those disgraced nobles should become really amalgamated with the citizens among whom they were forced to dwell, or could adopt their feelings, views, and prejudices. They were men, it must be remembered, of a different race, as well as of a different caste, and educated in traditional contempt of the class to which it was now sought to reduce them. A.D.  
1177.

They did come into the city, these houseless though in many cases still wealthy nobles; but it may well be doubted if they came with either the intention or the capability of becoming well-affected, loyal, and useful members of the Commonwealth. There is a remarkable fact which I do not think has ever been noticed, as bearing upon this point, but which appears to me to indicate in a curious manner a reserved hope on the part of these citizenized barons, analogous to that of those peasant families in Ireland who, it is said, carefully preserve the old title-deeds and charters which prove them to have once been possessors of the soil. When Count Guidi was defeated at Monte Croce, and his castle razed, he sold to the Bishop of Florence all his rights over the lands which had been attached to it. The sale was not definitively concluded, it would seem, till the year 1226; and the deed recording it is still extant, bearing that date. It is somewhat surprising, therefore, to find another deed, dated Cremona, 1247—twenty years subsequent, that is, to the date of the preceding document,—by which the Emperor Frederick II. confirms the Counts Guidi in all their possessions and rights at Monte Croce, which they had long before lost by conquest and by sale, without making any reference whatever to those circumstances. On which Repetti,\* who had probably examined a greater number of documents belonging to the centuries and countries in

\* Dizionario, vol. iii. p. 376.



A.D.  
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question than any man living, remarks, that nothing is more common than to find Imperial diplomas rehearsing the feuds once possessed by noble families, just as if they were still the possessors of them, many generations after they had been alienated to the various republics, or otherwise definitively lost; and professing to confirm the ancient holders in the possession of them. The meaning and object of so singular a practice can hardly be mistaken, any more than the significance of it as evidence of the degree of genuineness to be attributed to their acceptance of their new status by the Imperial nobles.

Meantime, while waiting for the return of better days, the nobles sought within the city walls to place themselves in that relation towards the citizens, which all their feelings, prejudices, and traditional opinions led them to consider as the only proper or "natural" one. They could not yet tolerate the notion of equality between themselves and such as those who now, with new-fangled audacity, full of danger (of course) to the best interests of society, called themselves their fellow-citizens.

The city to be ruled by consuls, and those to be chosen by the citizens! The arrangement might be tolerated as a means of keeping the rabble quiet, as long as the latter would give their votes as they were bidden. Otherwise, it might happen that they would take it into their heads to choose some man of their own class, whom the men of the old feudal nobility would be called on to obey! a consummation manifestly impossible to be submitted to!

For many years, it would seem that the people had been docile in this matter.\* The consuls that had been elected were in fact the nominees of the leading nobles in the city, and specially of the Uberti. This great and powerful family stands at the head of the roll given by Malispini,†

\* Coppo Stefani, book i. rubr. xlix.

† Chap. lii

of the most ancient and noble families who were settled in Florence before the building of the second city wall. The historian recounts a legend which represents the family to have descended from Catiline.\* But this was doubtless the invention of a later day, when it had come to be a more acceptable flattery to be deemed of Roman and pure Italian race, than of barbarian origin, even though the latter implied descent from the loins of nobles and conquerors, who had once in their knightly pride looked down with sovereign contempt on the conquered inhabitants of the lands they overran. The Uberti are again mentioned by the same historian, among those who possessed feudal tenures in the neighbourhood of Florence. "Many and many a stronghold they possessed around Scandicci† and elsewhere, which were all destroyed by the Commune." They belonged, therefore, to the class of Imperial nobles, and were, there can be little doubt, notwithstanding the early date of their citizenship in Florence, of German extraction, and descended from some knightly Hubert.

A.D.  
1177.

Malispini minutely records the position in the city of the mansions of most of the old families whom he mentions as having been settled in Florence at that early period. And in many instances their names, still household words in Florence, bear testimony to the whereabouts of their former local habitation; and in some cases the same spot of ground is still owned and inhabited by the same families to the present day. But the site of the Uberti houses and towers, though neither their name nor vestige of one stone upon another marks the spot, is better known in Florence than that of any other family. Their mansions are more conspicuous by their absence in Florence than the still extant walls, however lofty, of any of their contemporaries. There is not a stone to show that a

\* Malispini, chap. xxx.

† A village in Val di Greve, about four or five miles from Florence.

A.D.  
1177. city fortalice once stood in what is now the Piazza della Signoria, as nearly as possible on the spot now occupied by the beautiful fountain and colossal Neptune of Ammanati. But there is the oblique and strangely distorted wall of the Palazzo Pubblico. And who in Florence does not know, or what stranger does not ask, the cause of that extraordinary deformity? The Florentine people chose that the palace symbolizing the majesty of their Commonwealth should be forced out of its fair symmetry, rather than that any portion of it should stand on the ground banned far ever as having been polluted by the residence of those Uberti whose home had been razed to the ground as that of traitors to their country.

This strangely characteristic anecdote belongs to a period still far in the future at the time our story has reached. But it may assist us in forming an idea of the relationship in which this overbearing family stood towards the people, and in picturing to ourselves some of the scenes in the struggle that now ensued.

These Uberti had "pretty well always," says the historian,\* "caused the consuls to be elected as they chose, because they were the most powerful men in the city." But at last, in the year 1177, the city elected consuls really of their own choosing. The Uberti at once refused to accept or submit to the election. The popular party, supported by some of the nobles, replied that the election had been legally made, and that they intended to maintain it. Thereupon there was, for the first time, civil strife in the streets of Florence. But the match having been once lighted, all Florence was in a moment in a conflagration. The whole city flew to arms at the first sound of quarrel. And the suddenness with which the entire population enlisted itself on one or the other side, and the rapidity

\* Malispini, *loc. cit.*



with which the fight became general, would seem to imply that much bad blood must have already existed, and a strong partizan feeling have already developed itself.\* A.D.  
1177.

The first result of the struggle seems to have been that the people got the upper hand; for they carried their point, and the elected consuls remained in office. But the Uberti, though they perceived that they "had lost the fight for this time," by no means intended to abandon their pretensions, or give up the struggle. They perceived, says the historian,† that if they were beaten, it would always be so for the future; and their opponents were equally persuaded that no free election was to be hoped for without an annual fight for it, unless the power of the Uberti were checked.

So the struggle was continued; and the streets of Florence became a battle field for the next four years. Very curious is the account, curt and brief though it is, which the three historians cited give of the state of the city during these four years. And unless some considerable allowance be made for exaggeration, it seems to modern ideas impossible that civic life should have been carried on for such a length of time under such circumstances; or that society should have survived such a four years' course of anarchy and violence.

The earliest step taken on the first breaking out of the quarrel, seems to have been to convert the city into a collection of isolated fortresses. Most of the mansions of the nobles had one or more high towers attached to them, "a hundred, or a hundred and twenty *braccia* high;"—from two hundred to two hundred and forty feet. The possession of such an appendage was the especial mark and privilege of a noble residence. It also happened very

\* Malispini, chap. lxxvi.; Villani, book v. chap. ix.; Coppo Stefani, book i. rubr. xlix.

† Coppo Stefani, *loc. cit.*

A.D.  
1177.

generally that the houses of three or four families connected with each other by common descent, or by inter-marriage, stood together in the same neighbourhood. Then the plan adopted was to unite such a knot of buildings into one isolated and self-contained fortress, by means of barricades below, and galleries thrown from one to the other above. The fortresses thus constructed assailed each other, specially from the vantage points of their respective towers, with missiles and stones thrown from "manganelle," which may mean either cross-bows, or instruments made for throwing large masses of stones, after the manner of the ancient catapults. So universal was this fighting in every part of the city, that those few nobles who possessed no towers to their houses forthwith built them. The entire city was converted into a series of besieged strongholds, whence sallies were made by night and by day; and continual fighting was going on in the streets. Every thoroughfare was crossed by barricades, and "they fought with boar spears, laying in ambush for men as if they were at a boar hunt." \* In pitched battles, as the historian remarks, the combatants have to fear the terrible shock of the adversary, but nothing else. But in this street warfare it was far worse. It was as if a continual rain of rocks and stones was falling from the heavens. Men who lived through those times used to tell how, at every hour of the night and day, life was equally insecure;—how it was doubtful whether it were more necessary to guard your door, or your windows and roof;—how every man suspected an enemy to be hidden behind the curtains of his bed, or even within it.\* At last, say the historians, the citizens became so habituated to this life of perpetual warfare, and the excitement of it, that they would, in very wantonness, fight one day and eat and drink together the

\* Ammirato, book i. ad. an. 1177.

next, recounting and boasting over their deeds of prowess. A.D.  
1177. And thus they continued, till from mere weariness and satiety of excitement, this chronic state of civil warfare died out, rather than came to any definite end; and there was once more peace in the city. "But none the less," says Villani, "did these quarrels beget the accursed party spirit which afterwards infested Florence."

Other misfortunes befell the Commonwealth during these years of anarchy and violence. Twice during the month of August there occurred conflagrations, which threatened to compel peace between the citizens, by reducing their city to a heap of ashes. After the first of these misfortunes there was not a house left standing from the Ponte Vecchio to the old market-place, we are told.\* And the second fire is declared to have been yet more extensive.

As with regard to the extent and duration of the fighting in the city, so as to the accounts of these misfortunes, it is probable that some allowance must be made for that exaggeration in relating anything that excites the feelings and imagination of the narrator, which is to the present day so marked a characteristic in the idiosyncrasy of the people.

Scarcely were the calamities by fire over, before others almost equally disastrous came upon the Florentines by water. In the month of October of the same year † a terrible flood in the Arno carried away the Ponte Vecchio, and did much other damage.

It was quite a matter of course that the foremost minds of that age should see, as the hindmost minds of our own days still continue to see, in such calamities special judgments of God on the sins of the nation. Even Villani,

\* Coppo Stefani, book i. rubr. xlvii.

† There is some confusion in the chronology of these events. Villani gives 1177 as the year of those fires. Coppo Stefani leaves a blank for the date. The probability is that the real date was a year or two later.



A.D.  
1184. who appears to have emancipated himself from some of the superstitions of his time, as may be judged from his hinting occasionally that the explanation of events is rather to be sought in natural than in those supernatural causes to which it was the habit of his contemporaries to refer any unusual occurrence,—even Villani himself does not venture to question the opinion, that these disasters by flood and fire were the merited punishment of the “too great pride of the city, and the ingratitude of the citizens towards God ;” which, of course, means their insufficient attention to the ceremonies and the ministers of religion. It is remarkable enough, that though these things happened while the citizens were engaged in the hottest of their internecine quarrels, it does not occur to the expounders of Heaven’s judgments to attribute them in any degree to the wickedness of such fratricidal discord.

One of the first results of the cessation of these broils, was the stipulation of a league and treaty with the Comune of Lucca.\* The details of the provisions made by this instrument have been preserved, and are worthy of attention, as illustrative of the sort of relationship in which these political bodies stood towards each other at that period, and of the kind of good offices which the public opinion of the time expected from a friendly community.

The treaty was signed and sworn to by the advocate Tignoso, of Montecatini, who was at that time consul of Lucca, in the church of Pucheole, situated in the Lucchese territory.

The Lucchese undertake to defend the lives and property of Florentines in all places subject to their jurisdiction. No Florentine shall be sued for debt to a Lucchese without two months’ notice having been given to the

\* Ammirato, the younger, who has given the substance of this treaty in his supplementary additions to the first book of the elder Ammirato’s history, names the 21st of July, 1184, as the date of the ratification of it.

consuls of Florence; and if it shall become necessary to arrest any such debtor, it shall be done in such sort as to avoid as far as possible any scandal or shame to the person arrested.

For twenty years Lucca engages to assist Florence in any war within the dioceses of Florence or Fiesole, to the extent of taking the field for a space of twenty days; and specially if such war be against Pistoia. And in any other war, on the request of the consuls, podestà, or other rulers of Florence, the Lucchese shall go to their assistance with one hundred and fifty cavalry, and at least five hundred infantry and bowmen, to be armed, however, at the expense of the Florentines; and in any such war the Lucchese shall not make peace without the assent of Florence.

Lucca shall afford no aid, not even by counsel, towards the rebuilding or restoration of any castle within the diocese or territory of Florence, and particularly in the district between the river Elsa and the city of Florence; and within the said district the Lucchese shall make no acquisitions, but shall relinquish any that they may have already made there, even if such acquisition shall have become the property of the church of Lucca.

No impediment shall be thrown in the way of any foreigner wishing to proceed from Lucca to Florence, unless such person shall be an enemy to the city of Lucca.

It is further engaged that the above conditions shall be sworn to by six hundred citizens of Lucca, and that such oath shall be renewed at the expiration of every five years.

It is to be understood, however, that from the provisions of this treaty shall be excepted whatever might have the effect of breaking the peace between Pisa and Lucca; as also whatever would involve hostility to the Emperor,

or to his son Henry, king of the Romans; or further, whatever might involve war with the Genoese, the lords of Corvaria, of Porcari, of Montemagno, of Garfagnana, and certain other specified communities.

Such were the stipulations of a treaty made with the free and independent community of a rival city. It is interesting to compare with them the provisions of a capitulation made in the same year by Florence with the feudal lord and his vassals of Mangone, a *castello* belonging to the family of the Counts Alberti of Vernio, which the Florentines had taken by force and dismantled.

These Counts Alberti had large possessions in Val d'Elsa; and Florence was engaged in gradually abolishing them. This is the explanation of those special stipulations in the treaty with Lucca with regard to the district between Florence and the Elsa.

The Commune of Mangone, says the instrument, shall be held to make war and peace at the pleasure of the Commune of Florence.

The people of Mangone shall admit that all that they possess, within or without their walls, is held of the Commune of Florence, to which they shall pay every year a quit rent of one pound of pure silver, and offer a wax candle in the church of St. John the Baptist.

They are bound to furnish on demand lodging to the Florentine consuls to the number of twelve.

The Count Alberto, his Countess Tabernaria, and their sons Guido and Mainardo, promise by the next April to have razed to the ground their castle of Pogna, to have destroyed all the towers of Certaldo, and never rebuild them, and to give up into the hands of the Florentine consuls one of the towers of Capraia, at the choice of the said consuls, either to hold it or destroy it at their pleasure.

The above mentioned lords agree further, that the



Florentines shall impose a duty on the inhabitants of all their territory, and all the castles and towns held by them between the river Elsa and Florence, the half of such tax to go to the Commune of Florence, and the other half to the said Counts.

The said Counts also agree to pay to the Commune, before the end of next March, four hundred lire of good money of Pisa.

Lastly, they promise never to make either war or peace except at the will of Florence, and always to reside in that city two months in the year in time of war, and one month in time of peace.\*

These Counts Alberti of Vernio were a very great and powerful family ; and hard as the conditions of the above capitulation are, they have more of the appearance of an agreement with a sovereign prince, than marked the dealing of the citizens with most of the smaller tyrants, who were simply dispossessed and turned into private citizens at once. But the Florentines had not yet done with the Counts of Vernio, as we shall very soon see ; and the upshot was, at the end of a somewhat longer process, the same in their case as in that of all the rest of their peers.

It is remarkable that the nobles within the walls, those who had been discomfited by the Commune, had seen their castles destroyed, and who though submitting to become citizens, still felt as nobles, however much they were disposed in their new city home to make common cause against their plebeian fellow citizens, yet do not appear to have ever felt any disposition to aid their as yet undispossessed fellows in their struggles to hold their own against the forces of the Commune. It is difficult to suppose that they should not have been able to do so. They were able,

\* Ammirato, *loc. cit.*

A.D.  
1182. as we have just seen, to rouse and maintain a civil war within the gates of Florence; and yet they either could not or would not, at all events did not, prevent the citizens from going forth on new expeditions against the feudal nobles of the neighbourhood, as soon as ever they left off fighting among themselves. It is impossible to avoid feeling that these citizenized nobles seem to have acted very much after the manner of the fox in the fable, who, having lost his own tail, was well pleased that all the other foxes should be reduced to the same condition.

The new expeditions of the Florentines were against Monte Grossoli, a castle among the Chianti hills, and Pogna, a fortress in the Valdelsa, both held by "gentlemen who would not obey the Commune" of Florence, and both, as usual, destroyed. The Valdelsa, or valley of the Elsa, is an extremely pleasant district, watered by a river of that name, which, coming from the direction of Siena, falls into the Arno near Empoli, a little town eighteen miles from Florence, and nearly at the foot of the mountain on whose crest is situated that residence of the Imperial Vicars, San Miniato al Tedesco, the position of which has already been described. It will be observed, therefore, that the Commune continues to push back its frontiers, and that its castle-exterminating expeditions extend already to a far greater distance from the city than those earliest exploits narrated in the last chapter.

A little before this the Commonwealth had taken the first step in another course of policy, which indicates that the view of the citizens grew with the growth of their prosperous fortunes, and became rapidly wider and more ambitious. No longer contented with merely sweeping away the feudal tenants and their castles, they now began, at a distance of twenty miles from their own walls, to found other Communes, destined to become humble allies and dependents, and supporters of the Florentine power in

that debateable land on the frontier between them and the great rival Commonwealth of Siena. A. D.  
1183.

When the Florentine army was returning from the expedition against that city, mentioned at the end of the last chapter, some offence committed against the inhabitants of some scattered villages, about half-way between Florence and Siena,—about twenty miles, that is to say, from either city,—led those people to gather themselves together on a favourably situated spot, for the purpose of mutual support and protection. They surrounded their new settlement with a well-built stone wall, and called the place, which increased and thrived with extraordinary rapidity, Poggibonzi, from the name of the individual who had owned the hill—"Poggio"—on which the new town was built. And as the first object which had led to the foundation of the place, had been security from Florentine wrong-doing, Poggibonzi naturally allied itself with Siena. The new town grew strong; and the Florentines, as Villani says, were "exceedingly vexed" by its existence. In order to counterbalance the evil, therefore, they determined to found an opposition town in the immediate neighbourhood. So they gathered together the people of several other scattered hamlets in the upper part of the valley of the Elsa; they selected a very favourably-placed hill about three miles to the south of Poggibonzi, and there founded Colle, now a city, and one of the most thriving industrial towns in Tuscany. Commissaries were sent from Florence to superintend the building of the walls, and the first stone of them was laid in mortar made with the blood drawn in equal portions from the arms of the men of Colle and those of Florence, in token of everlasting amity and alliance; "and certain it is," adds Villani, "that the Commune of Colle has ever been as a daughter to that of Florence."

But while the Florentines were thus busy, according to



A.D.  
1184. the law of their nature, in putting down feudal castles and putting up burgher-ruled Communes, there was a little check in store for them, just to remind them that they and their city, and their political principles and practices, were looked on with no favourable eye by the great ones of the earth; and that if they were to hold the position they had assumed, they must expect to owe their political existence to the strength of their own walls, and the prowess of their own right arms.

Suddenly over the tops of the Apennines appears the figure of the Emperor, and that Emperor no other than Frederick Barbarossa! The boys were in the midst of their forbidden play when the schoolmaster suddenly made his appearance among them.

Frederick arrived in Florence on the 31st of July, in the year 1184.\* He had crossed the Alps for the fourth time. He was in his sixty-third year; and he was a wiser and more moderate man than when, furious in his hot youth at the opposition of the Lombard cities to his prerogative, he had laid Milan in ruins. His life had been a struggle with the necessities of a position which constantly required him to be in two places at once. Germany and Italy had equally needed his presence, and he had been unintermittingly hurrying from one to the other. He had been fighting a long and ever-losing battle with the Popes, whose spiritual arms were as yet irresistible. He had been thoroughly beaten at Como by those Lombard cities which he had so entirely despised, and he had been fain to make a peace, which yielded fully all they wanted of him, at Constance. A Tuscan league had also been formed against him, including in it all the leading Tuscan cities, save Pisa and Pistoia. But the Tuscan cities rose into power and importance at a later date than those of Lom-

\* Villani, book v. chap. xii.

bardy; with the exception indeed of Pisa, which remained as ever, Imperialist in her sympathies; and their league was of far less importance at the time, and less celebrity in history. A.D.  
1184.

Frederick had, however, now at last reconciled himself with the Church, and was about to wipe off all scores, and atone for all the shortcomings and misdeeds of a long life, by leading a Crusade against the Saracens. Under these circumstances, he was, notwithstanding all past reverses and miscarriages in his attempts to assert the supremacy of the Imperial authority over the Italian cities, able to appear at Florence with a fair show of Cæsarian majesty, and with the dignity and bearing of an arbiter and judge.

And there was a long bill of indictment to be preferred against Florence before the Imperial tribunal. Florence had been long living as if there had been no such thing as an Emperor in the world. She had oppressed and harried the Imperial vassals; she had routed the Imperial troops; and slain the Imperial vicar. She had grown fat and proud; had refused to submit to the dictation of nobles within her walls; and was already beginning to exhibit symptoms of that spirit which, when grown to its full strength, was to make her for many generations a thorn in the side of all principalities, powers, and legitimacies.

It certainly was not to be expected that any Cæsar would look with loving eyes on those stout and turbulent burghers, beginning now too, it may be believed, to appear less commonly in those virtuous bone-buttoned leathern jerkins, and more frequently in decorous cloth, while every young man was learning to think his senior's robe coarse in texture and in colour, and clad his own limbs in an improved material. Thriving traders, as ready with their pikes and crowbars, as with their pens and ledgers, who had more reverence for an Italian Pope than for a German

A.D.  
1184.

Emperor, and very far more for their own Commune than for either, who forced noble gentlemen to the degradation of becoming citizens, who would not even be ruled by them when they had become such, who would elect their own consuls, and prate about their own civil regulations as sovereign law ;—such a community assuredly could be no agreeable subject of contemplation to an Emperor by right divine.

But Frederick was no longer that terrible Barbarossa who had sown with salt the site of ruined Milan. There was many a silver streak now in that fiery auburn beard ; and many a severe lesson had moderated the light in that bold blue eye. The Emperor, about to assume the cross, was disposed to be moderate ; and Florence, it may well be supposed, was too much exhausted by her recent intestinal quarrels to be in the humour for open rebellion. Besides, the Emperor was reconciled with the Pope.

An ominous conjunction that ; boding nothing but evil to Florence and mankind. It is curious to reflect, that as this temporary and passing reconciliation of the temporal with the spiritual despotism presided over the first repression of Florentine freedom, so its ultimate destruction was effected only by the closer and more permanent alliance of the two great enemies of mankind.

On the present occasion Florence made no resistance, but sullenly held out her palm to receive the chastisement awarded by her Imperial pedagogue. On the formal complaint of the dispossessed nobles, the Emperor declared Florence to be deprived of all jurisdiction over the surrounding territory. Her authority was henceforth to be bounded by her city walls.\*

It can hardly be supposed that so experienced and able a man as Frederick imagined that this arrangement would

\* Villani, book v. chap. xii. ; Coppo Stefani, book i. rubr. lii.



last very much longer than till his back was turned. But the nobles may have flattered themselves that the good old times were coming back again, and there was an end of the violent upstart city which had bearded them; and they must have been not a little indignant and disgusted when, very shortly afterwards, the Emperor himself partially restored their jurisdiction to the Florentines as a reward for the conspicuous valour of a body of Florentine crusaders at the taking of Damietta. The jurisdiction was restored to them within a radius of ten miles from the city walls. A.D.  
1191.

But Frederick met his death, as most readers will remember, by bathing in that same Cydnus which was so nearly fatal to Macedonian Alexander; and his son Henry V. succeeded to the Imperial throne in 1191. During the first few years of his reign he continued on good terms with Pope Celestine, and was able to restore in some degree the authority of the Empire in most parts of Italy. But in 1198, Innocent III., a very different Pope from the irresolute Celestine, ascended the throne of St. Peter, and, as might have been anticipated from the nature of the man, very soon quarrelled with the Emperor and excommunicated him without hesitation. As usual, there was once again an end to the re-invigorated power of the Empire in Italy; a new Tuscan league was formed, under the protection of the Pope—to the exclusion, as before, of Pisa, which held firm to the Emperor; and Florence fell at once again into its former course of progressive aggrandizement and enlargement of its boundaries.

And its expeditions against the castles of the feudal nobility were continually extended to greater and greater distances from the city. So persevering, so systematic was their war against the holders of these ancient fiefs, that it is impossible to doubt that the Florentines had, from a very early date, conceived the ambition and formed

A.D.  
1191. the determination to become a powerful sovereign state. That the citizens of a free town, even supposing Florence to have been theoretically and legally as well as practically free, should have conceived such an ambition, is a remarkable fact, and marks a wide difference between the ideas and social theories of the rising cities in the great feudal monarchies of England and France, and those of Italy. The English and French cities, as they became rich and influential, struggled vigorously and successfully for enfranchisement, privileges, and a certain amount of independence and self-government within their own walls. But it never entered into the imagination of the most powerful among them to dream of sallying forth thence for the purpose of extending their power at the expense of the neighbouring territorial nobility. It is clear that their whole theory of social existence was a radically different one; and the difference must be attributed to that inheritance of old Roman ideas, grown by transmission through many generations into the nature almost of instincts, which, surviving all the dissolving power of the barbarian invasions, made it natural to those descendants of Roman colonists to think of a city as the only civilized social integer, and the natural centre of a larger or smaller dominion.

From those earliest expeditions against the nearest nobles—which, as we have seen, were undertaken almost as soon as the young Commune had a distinct consciousness of its own existence,—the citizens steadily pursued their object of replacing feudal jurisdiction by civic rule throughout the entire country which lay between their own walls and the frontier of the neighbouring cities. In 1192 we find recorded the solemn fixing of their limits by Imperial sanction, as has been stated, at a distance of ten miles from their walls. But without the smallest trace of any act rescinding that ordinance, or hint of its ceasing in



any way or for any reason to be in vigour, we find the irrepressible Commune marching out to put down and sweep away other castles during the latter years of the twelfth century; and in 1202 we have the record of the destruction of the important stronghold of Combiata in the Mugello, to the northward of Prato, at a distance of some twenty miles from the city on one side; and the taking in the same year, after a three years' siege, of the still more important castle and town of Semifonte, situated at an equal distance in the opposite direction.\*

A.D.  
1202.

This war against Semifonte—for the greatness of the effort would appear to have merited that name,—this three years' siege, seems to have been the most important contest in which the Commune had yet engaged. A special tax was imposed on all the inhabitants of the Florentine territory to meet the expenses of the expedition; a special tax, be it observed, levied on nobles and plebeians alike, for the destruction of a noble family, and for accomplishing that which was an act of audacious defiance of the Imperial authority, and in direct contravention of the decree of the Emperor so recently assigning the limits of the city jurisdiction.

Semifonte, though frequently called a “Castello,” was unquestionably much more than a castle. And indeed, in general the English word is a very imperfect rendering of the term “castello” in the pages of the Italian histo-

\* Malispini, chap. xcii.; Villani, book v. chap. xxx.; Coppo Stefani, book i. rubr. lvii. The work of subjugating and destroying Semifonte, spoken of in the text as a continuous effort of three years' duration, is considered by some chroniclers to have consisted of two separate expeditions, with an interval between them. There is a chronicle of this war, purporting to be by one Pace da Certaldo, which gives a very minute and detailed description of the town and fortifications of Semifonte, and of the incidents of the siege, even to the words used in a debate on the question of surrender. But the best modern authorities have judged this to be apocryphal, a romance rather than a history, and a production of a much later period. And indeed it bears on the face of it the strongest evidence of being so.



A.D. 1202. rians. A large city would hardly be called so. But any fortified habitation, or collection of habitations less than this, often the whole of a considerable town, is spoken of as a “castello” by the writers of those centuries; and a doggrel distich, which remained a proverbial saying in Florence for generations afterwards, is a proof both of the importance of the place, of the *animus* which impelled the Florentines to destroy it at all cost, and of the permanent remembrance left among the citizens of the greatness of the effort it had required.

“ *Fiorenza fatti in la !  
Che Semifonte si fa città.*”

“ Back, Florence, back! by the way that you came ;  
Semifonte the rank of a city would claim !”

The rhyme was sneeringly chanted in the streets of Florence, in days when scarcely a stone was left to mark the site of Semifonte ; and it is very easy to comprehend the feeling expressed by this persevering recurrence to the recollection of the exploit. “ What ! the feudal grandees would take a leaf out of our book, would they ? They can grow into cities, too—and think to establish one which is to check the progress and bar the further advance of Florence ! A very likely thing !” This, I think, is the sentiment, which remained fresh in the minds of the Florentine populace so many years after the destruction of their enemy.

For Semifonte, though the buildings gathered around the castle properly so called, amounted to a town which might be supposed capable of the ambition of growing to be a city, was in fact the property and feudal tenure of the great and powerful family of those same Counts Alberti, of Vernio, with whom Florence had already had dealings. Semifonte had been held by them from of old, and was confirmed to them by special diploma of Frede-

rick Barbarossa, bearing date 1164; and the signature of the possessor at that date, "Conte Alberto di Semifonte," <sup>A.D.</sup> 1202, is found at the foot of many imperial documents and decrees.\* But the researches of the learned writer cited at the foot of the page, have brought to light two or three other documents which illustrate in so curious a manner the character and conduct of this magnificent Albert of Semifonte, that they are worth citing as characteristic of the class which the citizens of Florence were determined to extirpate from the soil of Tuscany.

Who would have guessed, that while the noble "Albert of Semifonte" was thus grandiloquently swaggering in Imperial diplomas and courtly instruments, he had already sold to the Commune of Florence all his right to the lordship of Semifonte for four hundred† lire; and that he had, while his vassals were bravely withstanding a three years' siege in defence of their homes and, as they supposed, of his rights and property, engaged by deed dated 1199 ‡ not to assist them in any way in their war against Florence. And after this, when all was over, when of his castle and of his vassals' houses not one stone remained upon another, and the victorious Florentines had made a solemn decree that no building should ever again be raised on that spot, we find the sons of this Albert, in a deed dated 1209, reserving their right over the town and castle of Semifonte. This practice of the dispossessed nobles, of continuing to claim in all documents, rights, titles and possessions long since lost and forfeited, has been already noticed. But this instance of a double treason—of incredibly base treason, first to his own unhappy and betrayed vassals, and of attempted swindling as regards the Commune to which he had sold the rights he afterwards lays claim to,—on the part of one of the proudest and

\* Repetti, *loc. cit.*

† Document dated 1180, cited by Repetti, *loc. cit.*

‡ Cited, *ib.*

A.D. 1202. most powerful of the great families of that period, is worthy of being preserved.

It is unnecessary to record in detail all the similar but less important enterprises of the same sort, by which the Florentines responded to the Imperial decision shutting them within a circuit drawn at ten miles' distance from their city wall. The object in all these raids is exactly similar; and the upshot is always the same, except that the "castle," including a larger or smaller number of habitations gathered round it, was in some cases razed to the ground, while in others the Commune contented itself with compelling the feudal lords to reside in the city, and subjecting the vassals to their own jurisdiction. The main thing of interest is to observe that these expeditions became gradually more and more distant from the city; and that the extent of its territory was thus continually on the increase.

It is necessary, however, to mention more particularly a policy of another and a very different kind, by means of which the nobles about this time sought to stem the advancing tide of Florentine and civic—*i. e.*, anti-feudal—supremacy. This was nothing less than an attempt by some of the larger holders of Imperial feuds, to bid for the loyalty and affection of their subjects against the encroaching democratic Communes, by offering them such a measure of freedom and self-government as should convince them that they had nothing to gain by becoming the subjects of the latter. The homage thus paid to the irresistibly rising spirit of liberty and self-government, is one of the most significant and interesting evidences of the social condition and state of opinion at that time in Central Italy which history has preserved for us. And the contrast between such a policy on the part of a feudal chieftain, as that which I am about to cite, and the dealings of the great feudatories on the northern side of the



Alps, sets in a very strong light the great start in the van of civilization which Italy had already gained at the beginning of the thirteenth century. A.D.  
1208.

Those same counts Guidi of Modigliana who have been already mentioned as perhaps the most wealthy and powerful of the holders of Imperial feuds in Central Italy, and who were driven, as we have seen, from their castle and town of Monte Croce in 1154, were also lords of a small county, composed of five or six villages, in the valley of the Ambra. That river, flowing from the south out of the Chianti hills, falls into the Arno not far from the little town of Montevarchi, about half way between Florence and Arezzo. Shut up in the recesses of their pleasant and obscure valley, among the then roadless Chianti hills, it might have been supposed that the villagers of the Valdambra would have been content to be ruled by their native lords, as their fathers had been before them. And doubtless they would have been so content, had not the contagion of Florentine liberalism come near them. But Florence had already acquired territory at a greater distance from her walls than Valdambra; the Counts Guidi had already experienced the dangers to be feared from their proximity, and they determined to try what might be done by an attempt to attach their people to their own rule. For such a purpose, with democratic Florence within hail, it was necessary to bid high. And the reader will probably be surprised to see how high their bidding in fact was.

In 1208 Count Guido, surnamed Guerra, the third of that name, who had married a Florentine lady, the daughter of that great citizen, Bellincione Berti, whom Dante, it will be remembered, names as one of those who walked the streets in plain leathern jerkin in the good old days of Florence,—this Guido Guerra, mayhap having imbibed some more advanced notions from his citizen wife than fell ordinarily to the lot of the nobles of those days, ordered

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1208. that a body of statutes should be drawn up for the government of his *Viscontado* of Valdambra, as the Florentine historians generally call it. And not content with this singular innovation, he actually went to the length of directing that this should be done by twelve men of the various villages named by their fellow villagers. In a word, he granted a "constitution" to his subjects.

The remarkable document produced in consequence of this order has been preserved; and some of its provisions are well worthy of our attention.

The principle of self-government was conceded by the fact already stated; and it was guaranteed by the right of electing a Council to assist the head of the state, and by the yet more important right of public meeting and public debate. The chief magistrate was to be a Viscount or Podestà named by the Count. He was bound to go on circuit round the various villages of the state during twelve days of every month for the administration of justice. In certain specified cases he could not give judgment without the assent of the Council named by the inhabitants. Every male inhabitant from eighteen to seventy years of age was bound to swear fidelity and obedience to the Podestà and to the Commune, under pain of a fine and outlawry. Every inhabitant from eighteen to forty who did not attend Parliament when it was convoked by the Podestà, was subject to fine. It is to be understood, however, that they appeared there, not as sharers in political power, but as counsellors only. In some cases, however, specially in that of any proposed change in the statute, the Podestà could not proceed without the assent of the inhabitants assembled in Parliament. The public funds were kept by a treasurer, who submitted his accounts every two months to the Podestà and the Council. The taxes were imposed equally on every hearth or family; and the redevance of certain feudal services to the lord was maintained. The Podestà

was punished by fine if he neglected to administer justice promptly when called on by any plaintiff to do so. It was forbidden him to delay in pronouncing his sentence more than two months. All fines were to be paid within one month. In all cases of offence committed against a woman, or by a woman, the fine imposed was half that assigned by the law to a similar crime committed by or against a man. In cases of offences unforeseen by the law, the fine was to be assessed by the Podestà and the Council. The lord of the territory was not to interfere with the administration of justice, except that in cases where two different punishments were assigned by the law to any offence, it was competent to the Count to choose between them. Offences against any envoy or representative of the Count were to be punished as if committed against himself; and in such cases he was the arbiter of the punishment. If he chose to inflict a fine, non-payment within ten days was to be punished by the amputation of a foot or a hand, banishment, and confiscation of goods. Heavy penalties were enacted against incendiaries. Homicide was punished by a fine of a hundred lire (equal perhaps to the present value of 50%), without regard to the quality of the person slain. If the murderer was contumacious, he was sentenced to perpetual exile, and the destruction of all his possessions. Thieves were punished by fine and flogging; and if the fine was not paid within ten days, the thief was to lose a foot or a hand. Each of the villages was liable to claims for compensation for wrongs done by any one of its inhabitants, the plaintiff being required to swear that he was acting in good faith, and had used in vain every effort to discover the offender. The whole criminal jurisprudence is based entirely on the theory that every wrong done may be compensated by a money payment. Death or other corporal punishment is resorted to merely as subsidiary, and to avoid the defeat of justice by a non-payment of fines.

A.D.  
1208.



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1208.

The Latin text of this body of law was published for the first time a few years ago by Professor Bonaini, the Director of the Archives at Florence. But Professor Giudici has been the first\* to assign to the document its veritable historical significance, as an evidence of the efforts made by the rulers of the old society, as it had been previously constituted, to stem the rising tide of the new system, which was overwhelming them. The Professor makes the following remarks on this curious little thirteenth-century code, and his words are well worth quoting :—

“If we compare this political constitution of the people of the Valdambra with that, for instance, of the inhabitants of Susa, to whom Thomas of Savoy gave, in 1198, privileges probably more ample than those previously granted by his grandfather Amadeus III., we shall see very clearly the progress which civilization had made in these parts of Italy (Tuscany, the author means), which had been less affected by the rule of the barbarians, and by the admixture of their race. Nevertheless, both one and the other example will serve to prove how the feudal system, which, beyond the Alps, has been termed a perpetual tyranny broken up into bits, and for that reason more ferocious and cruel, suffered itself in Italy to be dragged along by the rapid and ever-increasing progress of civilisation. Nor was it the secular feudatories only who made large concessions of privileges and statutes to their vassals. The ecclesiastics also not only obeyed the inevitable influence of social progress, but in some instances they made the condition of the inhabitants of their territories such as to leave them no room to envy the citizens of the best constituted cities. They were driven to do this—it is well to repeat it—by the absolute necessity of the times ; seeing that the free Communes—which found in the greater num-

\* *Storia politica degli Municipii Italiani*, p. 553.

ber of citizens ready to defend their own walls a guarantee of their safety and of their future fortunes—had become as it were centres of attraction, inviting in a hundred ways the inhabitants of the surrounding country, who flocked to them for the sake of safety to their lives and property, and of enjoying beneath the shadow of the venerated *gonfalon* of the Commune, the pleasure of feeling themselves to be free men.”

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Of course all the efforts thus made were vain. Of course the security offered by the great Communes (though to our notions it was singularly insecure security), and the pleasure of feeling themselves to be freemen, by which is to be understood the pleasure of taking a part in the government; of being a member of the ruling class, which is, it may be remarked in passing, a very seriously different thing; of course all this prevailed. Of course it was then as ever useless for the old and effete to attempt competition with the new and young, for the birth of which the due and full time has arrived.

### CHAPTER III.

Foreign Podestà elected—Extension of the territory of the city—Forces against which Florence had to contend—Influence of the Papacy—Public opinion—Civil dissension fatal to Florence—Sameness of the underlying causes of the successive feuds—Why these quarrels were fatal to Florence—The title of Podestà not a new one—Significance of the regulation, that the Podestà must be a foreigner—Policy of distrust—War with the Siena—Quarrel between Buondelmonte and other nobles—Origin of the dispute—The jilted bride—Murder of Buondelmonte—Origin of the Guelph and Ghibelline feud attributed to this quarrel—Not so in reality—What the Ghibellines were—Real causes of the feud.

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1207. IN the year 1207 a very notable innovation was effected in the constitution of Florence. In that year a foreign Podestà was for the first time elected as chief magistrate of the Commonwealth.

We have traversed a space of about a hundred years from the period fixed on as the commencement of the independence of the Commune;—of exactly a hundred years, if we date that independence from those earliest recorded expeditions of the Florentines against some of the more immediately neighbouring and smaller feudal chieftains, which may be considered as marking the earliest self-consciousness of the infant community. In 1107 the Commune began its course of portentous growth, by absorbing the territories immediately outside those narrow bounds, some three miles from the walls, within which Dante would have wished to circumscribe his country. And in 1207 the resolution of the government, which



made it imperative that the first magistrate in Florence should be a foreigner, was accomplished. A.D.  
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Let us take a brief glance backwards at what has been done by the young Commonwealth in this first century of its existence.

The leading and by far the most prominent paragraph in the report, is that which signalizes the progress of material increase. As in the case of the individual infant, so in that of the young body social, this is the most notable and important phenomenon; and the chief business of the earliest historians of the Commonwealth is that of taking stock, and noting the rapidly progressing proportions of increment.

The elder historians narrate, one after the other, these incessant expeditions of their fathers against all their neighbours, and chronicle the unvarying results of them, very impassibly, as is their way, without any word of apology for aggressions, or any exultation over their gains. But later writers of Florentine history have been struck by the rapidity of this growth, and have enumerated the extraordinary lists of the Florentine conquests. But though an English reader might be astonished at the length of this roll of names, many of them existing no more save as reminiscences, they would afford him very little intelligible information of the extent of the increase accomplished by the Commonwealth. He will form a better idea of this by being told, that whereas a diameter of about six miles may be taken as the measure of the Florentine territory at the beginning of the century in question, a diameter of forty miles might with about equal precision be assumed as that of the acquisitions of the Commune at the end of it. The frontier had been pushed nearly half way to Pisa and Lucca, nearly to the walls of Pistoia, and much more than half way in the direction of the cities of Arezzo and Siena. The acquisitions of Florence indeed overlapped in

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part the latter city ; for she had already, as we have seen, quasi-subject Communes beyond it towards Perugia and Rome.

And this growth had been well-nigh continuous and unceasing. With one or two short and ineffectual checks, the progress had been unbroken ; and it had been accomplished in defiance of the greatest temporal authority then existing in the world—against the interest, against the wish, and in the teeth of the prohibitions of the Emperors. In vain had the more powerful of the Imperial feudatories, observing the fatal onward march of this upstart community, and looking forward with painful anxiety to the day when, with the inevitable certainty of an advancing ocean tide, their own turn to be swallowed up should arrive, appealed to their great chief and patron. In vain had they pointed out, with the irresistible logic of facts, that this dreadful community was insatiable, that its onward march was unbroken, that its ambition would be satisfied with nothing less than the possession and sovereignty of all Central Italy, and that if a remedy for the evil were not speedily adopted, the Imperial authority itself would find that it had lost all hold on Italy, when these Communes, and especially Florence, should have absolutely become strong enough to defy the Empire. The appeal was vain ; not because the Emperors did not feel the cogency of it, or did not sympathise with the complainants, but because they were powerless to prevent the evil.

In truth, when we consider the forces arrayed against each other in this struggle for supremacy, the result of the contest seems extraordinary in a greater degree than has been remarked by the historians who have treated of it. On the one side we have a little community of—say at the utmost a hundred thousand souls, including the inhabitants of the narrow strip of territory around the city,—citizens, accustomed no doubt to the use of arms, but organized for

civic and not for military purposes. On the other hand, we have a long list of military chieftains, whose profession and business was war, exercising absolute authority over a population of vassals and retainers very far larger than that of their adversaries, occupying an extensive territory studded with their strongholds and fortified towns, knowing that their interests and dangers were perfectly identical, and supported by the whole force of the Imperial interest and authority. A.D.  
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There was, however, one other force which fought on the side of the citizens, which must be taken into account—the Papacy; and had there been no such force in existence, the issue of the struggle must, as far as a judgment can be formed on an hypothesis which deranges every element of the problem, have been different; but it is necessary that the mode in which this force operated should be rightly understood. We do not find any trace of active interference by the Popes on behalf of the Florentines; but they every now and then paralysed the Imperial power by their anathemas and excommunications, and this usually exactly at those moments when the danger to be feared from the Emperor's power in Italy was the most imminent. There was also another way in which the Popes were no doubt useful to the cause of the citizens. They made what has been called in the jargon of modern party strife, “a good cry.” Emperor and Empire were words of power in Italy. To renounce and outrage that constituted authority was an audacious illegality that made it very necessary for those engaged in it to have some pretext, something to say for themselves, some “cry” to oppose to that old and powerful one of the Empire; and this the Church and its fortunate stage of antagonism to the Empire afforded.

Nevertheless, the victorious and irresistible progress of the Commune of Florence against all the forces and



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1207. interests opposed to it, was one of those events which have so often in the history of the world gone to prove that great social mutations are produced and ruled, not so much by those visible and superficial causes which appear in the form of events, are recorded in the pages of history, and are calculable as material forces, as by those less traceable, more subtle, and more pervading influences which operate on the opinion and the will of large numbers of individuals. It is a common mistake to speak of public opinion as a new force of modern date in the world. Public opinion has in modern social bodies means of manifesting itself and propagating itself infinitely greater than was the case in the centuries of which we are speaking. Its force is on that account greater, its operation very much more rapid, and especially very much more visible. It is also, from the same causes, liable to be more changeable and less persistent in its direction. But it is a mistake, I think, to assume that it has been non-existent or inoperative in social conditions, where it has been inarticulate, unappearing, and even void of self-consciousness. Only in those social organisms which have remained for long periods without change can it be fairly assumed that no public opinion has existed.

This was assuredly the force which supplemented the apparent material weakness of the winning party in the struggle between the old feudalism and the new civic society. That curious Valdambra statute is a very notable evidence to the existence, power, and tendency of the public opinion of that day in Tuscany. Men had no newspapers, and read hardly at all. But they talked. The pen, it is true, addresses its thousands, when the tongue can reach only tens. But at the best of either instrument, the tongue is within its limits the more powerful of the two; and in a community very small in proportion to the numbers with which modern social systems have to deal,

the advantage in favour of the tongue was yet greater. A.D. 1207.  
It was greater also on the southern than it would have been on the northern side of the Alps. The Italians talk more than we northern folk do, and they talk better. Eloquence is a far more common gift among them than among ourselves. The pleasure of discourse is more keenly appreciated by all classes of society ; and the desire of expressing—"externating" as the Italian phrase has it—the thought within is stronger with those impulsive races. Italian mediæval society stood therefore at a less disadvantage in this matter of public opinion, when compared with the same society in our own times, than our own ancestors of the thirteenth century would stand as compared with our nineteenth century England.

It cannot be doubted, I think, that the contagion of prevailing opinion operated even on the minds of those who were to be the victims of it, paralysing their efforts at self-defence by the dispiriting consciousness of having a bad, a reprobated, and a losing cause, and explaining in some measure that strange absence of any combination for self-preservation which has been already noticed.

This extraordinary growth of the young Commonwealth, this advance in spite of all opposition, this portentous onward movement like the roll of a tide that gathers force and impetus as it sweeps over every dyke and barrier in its course, is the main fact and feature of its history during the first century of its existence. The momentum is very far from having expended itself. The period of growth and increase is by no means at an end. The youthful prodigy is far from being full-grown as yet. The law which we have seen presiding over its development hitherto will continue to be operative.

But there is another important feature to be noticed in the history of this first century, which will be found to be an abiding one during the remainder of the career of the

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1207. Commonwealth ; the first symptoms of a malady, which having its roots thus deeply implanted in the constitution of the body social, will be seen, as we proceed, to grow with its growth and strengthen with its strength. Civil war has already made its appearance in Florence. This was the death-germ that every living creature brings with it into the world ; the principle of dissolution, which is ultimately to overpower that other principle of vitality, the vigorous development of which we have been recording.

Everybody who has ever heard of the history of Florence knows, in a general way, that a very large portion of that history is occupied with the never-ending dissensions and party feuds of the citizens. And they have heard these spoken of by names taken from the party rallying cries, which have become as well known in history as they once were in the streets of Florence. Who has not heard of the enmities of Bianchi and Neri ; of Guelphs and Ghibellines ; of Palleschi and Ottimati ? And in reading the historians of the different ages of the Commonwealth, each outbreak of hostilities will be found attributed to some special event, which is stated to have led to all the mischief. But an examination of the entire course of that history will lead the student of a later day to conclude that such divisions must be attributed to some underlying cause, of larger and deeper significance than any to which they are attributed. A match falling into a powder-barrel is in one sense the cause of all the wide-spread ruin that follows. But the destructive force which has been put into activity, had been previously prepared and stored up, without which the accidental match would have been harmless. A careful consideration of the political bearing of that incessant partisan warfare, will, it seems to me, lead us one step further than this ; and bring us to the conviction that the real underlying cause of the differently-named party-feuds which



divided the republic, were throughout the entire course of the history one and the same. A.D.  
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These dissensions were in fact, and at the bottom, phases of the great quarrel as old as humanity, as widely spread as the world ; the quarrel between the few who have, and would keep, the high places and the good things of society, and the many who would share them. It is a quarrel that suffers truce only in climes and ages in which mankind are making no onward movement, and have fallen furthest from our highest ideal of human destinies. It is a quarrel that was waged more or less actively in every part of Europe, in the ages of which we are speaking, but which was inflamed into acute excess and violent eruption in Florence by certain circumstances peculiar to that social organisation.

This old and perennial struggle, however, if the view of it enunciated in the above lines be admitted, must be held to be not only normal and inevitable, but also salutary. Yet in Florence it produced devastating lacerations of the body social, and ultimately its destruction and extinction.

Whence happened this ?

The disaster is attributable, I think, to two causes. In the first place it was due to the illegitimate pretensions and immoderate violence of those who sought to rise, and specially to their conception of the nature of the advantages to be attained by such rising ; to their having conceived liberty to consist not so much in escaping from the undue interference of others with their own volitions, as in attaining the power to interfere with the volitions of their neighbours ; not so much in being themselves free from tyrannical government, as in being admitted to become sharers in the power of tyrannising. If the acts and pretensions of the Florentine populace at the period of their most successful attempts to participate in the governing power be exa-

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1207. mined, it will be found that they made no demand to the effect that freedom should be increased, that the citizens should be less shackled by governmental interference, less hedged about by rules and regulations, less exposed to espionage. They only insisted that a larger number should have the right to impose the shackles, make the rules and regulations, and hear the result of the espionage. In a community, where such notions prevailed, even if every smallest governmental act had been voted by an assembly of the entire population, individual freedom would have gained nothing.

This was the first cause. But if it be objected that similar want of moderation, and similarly unphilosophic views, have prevailed in other communities, it may be replied,—first observing by the way, that no community where similar notions of liberty have prevailed, or rather where similar desires have been stronger in men's minds than the desire of liberty, has ever yet attained to a system of stable self-government,—premising this, it may be replied, I say, that this evil worked to a more direct, decisive, and complete ruin in Florence, by reason of the second of the two causes above-mentioned.

This was the smallness of the community, and the consequent directness and immediateness of the action exercised by individuals on the social organisation; to which is to be added, as arising from the same circumstance, that element of personal hatred which played so large a part in Florentine history, and which cannot exist where men are not brought into close personal contact with each other. A revolution, a rebellion, a disturbance in Florence, had all the intensity and peril of a mutiny on board ship, the dangers of which are increased tenfold by the confinement of the explosive elements within a small space. And in reading of the results produced in Florence by the will of an individual, or of a small knot of

individuals, it is always necessary to remember and make allowance for this fact.

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To enter here upon the task of showing that in their true significance all the long series of Florentine civil wars were truly due to the causes which have been named, would be to anticipate conclusions which should be drawn from a consideration of each case as it comes before us. It is sufficient for my present purpose, while noting that already in this first century the poison of civil discord had shown itself, to have drawn attention to the law, which will be found to contain the true explanation of this large portion of Florentine history, and of the deplorable failure of one of the most noteworthy tentatives at social organization ever seen in the world.

The appointment of a Podestà as chief magistrate of the city in 1207, which marks the commencement of the second century of the life of the Commonwealth, is spoken of by several chroniclers as the first occasion on which an officer of that name was known in Florence. But it would seem that such was not the case. The title is met with in some of the Lombard cities at a much earlier date; and an officer with that name is unquestionably mentioned in authentic Florentine documents of a date previous to the thirteenth century. The explanation of the contradiction, however, seems to be found in the fact, that in 1207 a *foreign* Podestà was appointed for the first time in Florence.

And in truth, the whole interest and importance of the innovation lies in this, that the new chief magistrate was to be thenceforward necessarily a foreigner. The adoption of one title or another would have been a matter of small moment; but the opinion maturely adopted by a free community, that they could not venture to entrust judicial power over their persons and property to any man among themselves, is a very curious and suggestive circumstance.



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The new regulations required, not only that the Podestà should be a foreigner, but that he should be chosen from a city at least fifty miles distant from Florence. He remained in office for one year. His power was strictly judicial, comprising the administration of both civil and criminal justice. His official costume was a long robe (*lucco*) of scarlet cloth, and he took precedence of every other person in the city. The political administration of the government remained with the Consuls as before.

The chroniclers who record this innovation agree together completely in the motives to which they assign the change.\* It was found that no citizen of Florence could be trusted to withstand, in the administration of civil and criminal justice, the influences of fear or friendship, or interest or pity. A Florentine judge would decide a suit unjustly in favour of his friend. Therefore it was determined to have a judge who had no friends among his suitors. A Florentine magistrate would be deterred from putting the laws in action against a criminal, for fear of the subsequent vengeance of that criminal or his friends. Therefore, a stranger must be brought from a distance to do this odious duty, who, returning at the end of a year to his own distant home, would be safe from such danger, and therefore uninfluenced by such fears.

The measure has been praised, as indicating a determination on the part of the community to secure purity of justice and equal administration of the law, and as a wise and ingenious method to the attainment of this end. But I confess that the provision suggests to my mind reflections of a different kind. Doubtless the Florentines objected to leave their property at the mercy of a magistrate who could not be trusted to give a sentence at variance with his own or his friends' interest; or to entrust the pro-

\* Malispini, chap. xciv.; Villani, book v. chap. xxxii.; Coppo Stefani, book i. rubr. lx.

tection of their lives and persons to a judge who feared to put the law in action against powerful or desperate evil-doers. But surely the remedy adopted,—not to insist on the great probability that it would prove inefficacious,—admits the existence of a very unsound condition in the body politic; while the disposition to acquiesce in that condition, and to accept it as a normal and inevitable incident of human society, betokens an exceedingly unsatisfactory tone in the public mind and conscience, and discloses ominously discouraging symptoms of the prevailing views respecting the objects to which a community should direct its efforts. A pack of hounds may obtain fairness in the distribution of their rations by submission to the huntsman; but they will none the less remain hounds to the end of the chapter.

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It has an ominous and evil-boding look about it, to my thinking, this import trade in common honesty and high principle, resorted to by the young community in the first vigour of its youth. It is the first manifestation of that policy, or rather of that instinctive habit of universal distrust, which will be found deeply marking all the future course of this history. And it presents itself to our consideration at this its earliest appearance, as a second worm in this vigorous and apparently healthy bud, destined to contribute much towards that premature decay and death in which we know our story is to end, and the causes of which it is our business to investigate. We shall see this policy and this vice of character in its working, and in its wide-spread consequences as we proceed; and we shall see the narrow cunning and skilful calculation on low motives and base sentiments, which a mind educated under such a system mistakes for wisdom, set forth as such by statesmen and writers, in whose school generations less enlightened than our own have sought maxims of statecraft.

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How little good is to be learned in that school;—how an atmosphere of universal suspicion and distrust is as fatal to national greatness and prosperity, as it is to individual nobleness;—how men become untrustworthy by being distrusted, and are made worthy to be trusted by having trust reposed in them;—how far less is the evil, as to an individual so to a nation, that may arise occasionally from confidence misplaced, than that which must inevitably be generated by the habit and policy of trusting no man;—how vain the hope that the precautions of distrustfulness will in the main attain their object, or that those valuable fruits, which can only grow on the tree of public virtue, may be artificially produced by the schemes and checks of suspicious vigilance:—these are among the truths which it seems to me the history to be narrated is eminently calculated to teach.

The first Podestà under the new regimen was Gualfredotto of Milan, who was continued in his office for a second year, the rule peremptorily limiting the duration of the Podestà in office to one year being the result of a subsequent attempt to provide against an abuse of the powers entrusted to him.

The events of these first years of the thirteenth century continue to be of the same kind as those which made up the history of the growing Commonwealth during the preceding period;—fresh destructions of feudal castles, fresh encroachments on neighbouring jurisdictions, and almost unceasing pushing back of the frontier. What mainly characterises the new century, however, is an increased frequency of war with the neighbouring rival cities. The course of continual aggrandizement on which the Commonwealth had been advancing for several generations past made it evident that such must before long be the case. The Florentine frontier had already, as we have seen, advanced more than half way towards Siena. There



it met the advanced posts of another vigorous and growing community, a rival of its own sort. And a series of struggles commenced with a far more equally matched adversary, than any with whom Florence had yet contended. Henceforward accordingly the military career of the Commonwealth was by no means so unchequered by reverses, as it had been while engaged in sweeping from the surface of the soil one after the other, the castles of the feudal nobility. A.D.  
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Siena was no mouthful to be snatched, swallowed, and assimilated after the fashion in which Florence had disposed of the feudal tenures which had stood in her path. The enmity therefore, which was sure to arise between the two communes when brought face to face with each other, did not assume the form of an attack with the avowed object of conquest, but broke out on occasion of questions of frontier line, and jealousies of the relations of either party with other smaller communes.

The small but strongly situated town of Montepulciano, perched on the top of its lofty hill, after the fashion of the old Etruscan cities, the site of one of which it occupies, is much nearer to Siena than to Florence. It lies indeed on the other side of Siena away to the south-eastward, towards Perugia; and is in fact little less than half way from Florence to Rome. The surrounding powers therefore, of every kind, whether princes or cities, might well begin to ask where the aggressions and pretensions of this upstart Florence were likely to stop, when that ambitious community announced its intention of taking Montepulciano "under its protection;" and marched an army to prevent Siena from meddling with it in any way. Already once before, a peace had been made with Siena on condition that she was in no way to interfere with Montepulciano. But in the first year of the new Podestà's rule, Siena broke the treaty by attacking her weaker neighbour.

A.D.  
1215. Whereupon, Florence at once marched out against the Sienese forces, and defeated them at Montalto, a fortress on the Sienese frontier to the eastward, about half-way between Siena and Arezzo, leaving many of the enemy dead on the field, and bringing back with them to Florence 1331 prisoners.\*

Siena sued for peace; and it was granted on condition that she should rebuild the walls of Montepulciano, and also those of Montalcino, another hill town, about twenty miles to the south of Siena, which Florence chose equally to protect; and that she should promise not to make war on either of these two communities for the future. Both of these two little "protected" cities were but out-posts of the Florentine power, which thus had already hemmed in Siena well-nigh on all sides.

Looked at from without, while she was thus victoriously and proudly dictating conditions of peace to neighbouring cities, and pushing the limits of her power half-way towards Rome, all appearances testified to the wonderful vigour and prosperity of the young state, and called the attention of Europe to the advent among the nations of a new comer already evidently destined to occupy a place of primary importance among them. But within the walls our attention is called to events of a very different character and significance.

In the year 1215 it chanced that a quarrel occurred at a festival between some young nobles of Florence. It was an event of as frivolous, and apparently unimportant, a character as thousands of other such broils; but this obscure quarrel has been treated by the whole body of Florentine historians as the origin and starting point of that series of civil wars which shaped the entire future fortunes of the community, and shook to its centre the

\* Coppo Stefani, book i. rubr. lxi. The other historians do not mention the circumstance of the prisoners.

whole fabric of society throughout central Italy. The story of it has become memorable therefore in Florentine annals, and has been rendered famous not only by the writers of history, but by many generations of poets, painters, novelists, and sculptors. A.D.  
1215.

When the story shall have been told, it will be time to inquire how far the circumstances can be fairly made to bear the immense burthen of consequences which has been laid upon them.

Messer Mazzino 'Tegrini de' Mazzinghi had been admitted to the order of knighthood; and about the beginning of the year 1215, a festival was to be given to celebrate the occasion, at Campi, now a large and populous village, three or four miles from the city, on the side of Prato, where almost all the female population may be seen seated at the doors of their dwellings plaiting straw from morning till night. At the date of our story Campi was probably only the fortified villa and farm of the giver of the feast. Among the guests was the young and remarkably handsome Buondelmonte de' Buondelmonti. We have heard all about his parentage, and how they came to be Florentine citizens, as the reader will remember. The name, as given above, indicates that the family had thriven and extended itself since it had been transplanted to Florence some seventy years before. It is clear also that no prejudice or jealousy connected with his origin prevented the young scion of the Buondelmonti from standing well with his fellow-citizens. He was invited to the festival, together with a party comprising many of the most conspicuous names in Florence; and the sequel makes it evident that the young man, the remarkable beauty of whose person is specially recorded by the chroniclers, was considered one of the most desirable sons-in-law by the match-making mothers of Florence.

Young Buondelmonte had taken with him to the



A.D.  
1215. festival his friend Uberto degli Infangati,—Hubert the Mudbedraggled, of that ilk ;—a proud old family of the earliest Florentine times, whose name, unheroic-sounding to modern English ears, was probably first bestowed on the actor in some deed of prowess which left him in the plight described, and was afterwards retained with as much pride by his descendants as that of any noble race in a more euphonious appellation.

While they were sitting at table, “a jester,” the chronicle says, whether meaning a professional buffoon or a wag among the company is not clear, snatched a plate of meat from before this Hubert, who was so much nettled at the impertinence that when Oddo Arringhi dei Fifanti, one of the guests, proceeded to banter him, he lost his temper completely, and in reply to something said by Oddo, gave him the lie direct. Whereupon Oddo seized a plate from the table and hurled it at Hubert’s head.

Hitherto Buondelmonte had not been concerned in the quarrel in any wise, but he seems to have thought that it was incumbent on him to resent the insult thus publicly offered to his friend ; and as soon as the “tables were withdrawn” he stabbed Oddo with his poniard. On this, the party broke up in anger and confusion ; and the special friends and connections of the wounded man, returning to Florence together, took counsel respecting the satisfaction to be exacted from the assailant. There were present men of the Gangalandi, Amidei, Uberti, Lamberti, and other families, all, like Buondelmonte himself, descended from feudal nobles of the Empire, and all, therefore, united by political feeling and social prejudice. This made it possible to arrange the affair in a manner that would not otherwise have been feasible. It was agreed that a reconciliation should be effected by a marriage between Buondelmonte and the niece of the injured man, Oddo Arringhi ; and it would seem that this arrangement

was at once acceded to by Buondelmonte, inasmuch as it is recorded that the betrothal was fixed to take place on the next day but one. A.D.  
1215.

But on that intervening day, while the bridegroom was riding through the city, as he passed by the mansion of the Donati family, Monna Gualdrada, the wife of Messer Forese de' Donati, called to him from her window to alight, and come up to speak with her. There was a marriageable daughter too in the house of the Donati, and Monna Gualdrada had long cherished the hope of obtaining the handsome scion of the Buondelmonti for a son-in-law. So she spoke after the manner of would-be mothers-in-law in all ages and climes;—taunted him bitterly with taking a wife at the bidding and for fear of the Amidei and the Lamberti,—contrasted the wife thus forced upon him with the bride she had, as she declared, long reserved for him, having with a view to his alliance already rejected many brilliant offers;—and finished by throwing open the door of an inner chamber in which her daughter was sitting, and telling him to look at the bride, who might yet be his, if he had but the courage to take her.

The lady of the Amidei family whom he had agreed to marry as a fine for having been too ready with his dagger, was, we are told, not handsome; and the chroniclers all dwell on the matchless beauty of the young Donati. The result was that the young man, thus sorely tempted, became, “by the devil’s assistance,” as Villani says,\* desperately enamoured of the beautiful girl thus offered for his acceptance; told Monna Gualdrada that he did dare to please himself, despite all the Amidei in Florence; and the next day, which was Thursday, the 10th of February, while all the parties to the other engagement were waiting at the house of the Amidei for the ceremony

\* Lib. v. chap. xxxviii.

A.D. 1215. of the betrothal, went publicly and betrothed himself to the beautiful Donati.

It could hardly be supposed that such an insult as this would be allowed to pass without signal vengeance. All the friends of the Amidei assembled at once in the church of *Santa Maria, sopra portam*,\* to decide on the steps to be taken. It was proposed by some that the false traitor to his engagement should be waylaid and beaten; by others, that his face should be gashed in such sort that he should carry the mark of his chastisement to the grave with him. But Mosca de' Lamberti warned the meeting against any such half measures. "Beat him, or mark him as you will," said he; "but if you stop there you may as well take thought for your own graves. No! he deserves death. Let him die! *Che cosa fatta capo ha!*"† This counsel prevailed; and it was determined to avenge the slighted honour of the Amidei, involving also an insult to all those noble families who had taken part in putting an end to the original quarrel by arranging that match, in the most signal manner. The faithless bridegroom was doomed to be slain on his return from the church with his newly-wedded bride.

The wedding took place in the church of Santa Felicita, near the foot of the Ponte Vecchio, on the morning of Easter Sunday. After the ceremony, the wedding party, returning over the Ponte Vecchio, had to pass before the houses of the Amidei. The conspirators were all gathered there; and it could hardly be that Buondelmonte could have seen that knot of the men he had deceived and so grievously insulted standing there with their lowering faces, and fancied that he was to ride by them in his gala triumph with his bride, unquestioned. Nevertheless, he

\* No longer existing.

† An expression which was or has since become proverbial. "A deed done has a head;" i.e., a thing done outright is done, finished, and completed.



came riding on in the pride of his beauty, "clad in jacket and mantle of white silk, with a garland on his head,"\* till he came in front of the home of the lady he had jilted. A.D.  
1215.

Then with a shout, Schiatta de' Lamberti sprung out into the street, and with one blow of an iron mace brought the gay rider from his saddle to the ground. In an instant he was surrounded by the rest of the band; and Oddo Arringhi, the man whom he had wounded, and whose niece he had wronged, cut his throat with his dagger.

The assassins retired to their fortress houses, and left the bridal party to form itself as it might into a funeral procession. "Great was the uproar in the city. He was placed on a bier; and his wife took her station on the bier also, and held his head in her lap, violently weeping; and in that manner they carried him through the whole of the city; and on that day began the ruin of Florence."†

The last phrase of the above citation marks the significance which the Tuscan historians have attributed to this incident, and the important place that has always been assigned to it in Florentine history. We are told by all the earliest historians, especially by Malispini, in whose childhood these events must have happened, and whom Villani copies almost word for word, that from this quarrel began the great, fatal, and world-famous division of Florence into the parties of Guelph and Ghibelline. Dante goes so far as to consider the conduct of Buondelmonte in this affair so entirely the cause of the evils that arose from the Guelph and Ghibelline wars, that, had that cause not existed, no such misfortunes would have arisen. "O Buondelmonte," he exclaims—

\* Chronicle, cited more particularly in the next note.

† All the historians relate the facts without any material discrepancy. But the above details have been taken from a little chronicle by a contemporary, or nearly contemporary, writer belonging to the Buondelmonti family, and first printed in a volume now become rare, "*La Toscana Illustrata nella sua Storia*," 4to, Livorno, 1755. See page 283.

A.D.  
1215.

“ O Buondelmonte, quanto mal fuggisti  
 Le nozze sue per gli altrui conforti !  
 Molti sarebbon lieti che son tristi,  
 Se Dio t' avesse concesso ad Ema  
 La prima volta ch' a città venisti.” \*

Yet the historians admit that the party names of Guelph and Ghibelline were known in Florence long before ; but they say that not till then did the city divide itself into two hostile camps under those rallying cries. It is curiously clear, from the accounts of Malispini and Villani, that, as usual in such matters, the Florentines had but a very hazy notion as to the meaning and origin of the two names,† for the sake of which they were prepared to cut each other's throats. Any name or watchword is good enough for a party rallying cry, when once passions have been connected with it ; but the Florentines understood that Ghibelline meant attachment to the Empire in opposition to the Church, and Guelph attachment to the Church in opposition to the Empire. But it would be a mistake tending much to prevent a right understanding of the future course of Florentine politics, to suppose that enthusiasm in favour of either of these two institutions, or hatred against either of them, had much to do with the party strife that divided Florence. The antagonism between the civil and the ecclesiastical power is in truth as old as ecclesiastical encroachment, and must be as perennial as the existence of

\* Paradiso, cant. xvi. ver. cxxxviii. “ O Buondelmonte, how ill thou didst in evading the alliance with the Amidei by listening to the counsels of another ; (i.e. of Gualdrada Donati.) Many would now be happy who are in sorrow, if God had given thee a victim to the river Ema, when first thou crossedst it to come to the city.” That is to say, when first your ancestors, who established the family in Florence, did so. The river Ema runs between Florence and Monteboni, the original seat of the Buondelmonti family.

† It is hardly necessary, perhaps, to note that the Imperial house of Franconia received the appellation of *Ghibelline* from the castle of *Weibling*, in the mountains near Augsburg, and the rival house of Bavaria was called Guelph, because many of its members were named Welf.

Church temporalities. But the quarrel of Guelph with Ghibelline in Florence was the expression of a still wider spread and more perennial conflict. It was the struggle of those who have, and would keep to themselves wealth, power, station, and pre-eminence, with those who have not, and would acquire all these things. The Ghibellines were the old Imperial nobles, who, whether more anciently or more recently incorporated into the body of Florentine citizens, formed the aristocracy of the social body, and were naturally Imperialist in their sympathies. These Ghibellines were the high Tories of the Florentine community. The body of the people were Guelphs, naming themselves after the party professing attachment to the Church only because the Papacy was in opposition to the Empire. The Guelphs were the Whigs of Florence. The Radicals appeared on the scene in due time and normal sequence, as will be seen.

A.D.  
1215.

What Englishman does not know how a progressive civilisation deals with such party landmarks?—how high Toryism gets gradually pushed out of existence, and is lost sight of;—how Whiggism, stepping into the vacated place, loses some of its previously distinguishing characteristics, partly from having succeeded to a position, which naturally induces the opinion that progress has gone far enough, and should now halt, and partly from having been left behind by the onward flow of ideas;—how Whiggism under these circumstances divides itself, and gives the name of Radicalism to its less aristocratic and more active portion. All this movement of party,—exactly this progression of events, will be seen to pass in due and normal order across the field of Florentine history. The Ghibellines will gradually vanish from the scene, even as Toryism is vanishing. The Guelphs will divide and give rise to parties with new names, even as the Whigs have done.

And assuredly all this would have happened in no very



A.D.  
1215. material circumstance differently from what did happen, even had the first Buondelmonte who ever came to Florence perished in the Ema on his way thither. It can hardly, I think, be doubted that the writers who have represented all this great series of social developments as arising from the fault of Buondelmonte, and the punishment of it, have fallen into the common error of mistaking for a cause that which was only a symptom or manifestation of a condition produced by causes of much wider operation.

It will be remembered, too, that this was not the first outbreak of civil discord in Florence. The party fights which arose respecting the election of Consuls in the year 1185, only thirty years, that is, before Buondelmonte's death, divided the city very much in the same sense. There were then the Uberti and the other Imperialist nobles, their natural friends and allies, on the one side, and the people, with such nobles as were moved to take the popular part, on the other. It is very significant also, that the Buondelmonti family, which had previously been Ghibelline in its politics and sympathies, as was naturally to be expected from its feudal origin, became, at this time, and from henceforth remained Guelph. The meaning of this is, that in order to obtain vengeance for the murder of their kinsman by those who were, as we have seen, all Ghibellines, they found it necessary to take advantage of the passions of the opposite party. Had the division of the city taken its rise from the Buondelmonti quarrel, the citizens would have divided themselves differently, and no such change of political party would have been needed. Nobles and people alike would have espoused either side of the quarrel according to their personal sympathies and connections. But this change of party by the Buondelmonti proves clearly that the hatreds arising from the murder of their kinsman were but engrafted on pre-existing enmities.

A spark falling into an open barrel of gunpowder in a dwelling-house causes the destruction of all around it. But the victims of the disaster would not say, "Ah! if no spark had ever fallen!" but rather, "Ah! if that gunpowder had not been left there!" Sparks will fall; if not at one moment, at another. We are told of cases in which a scratch on the finger causes death. But the real cause of it is in the bad condition of the organism so injured. It must needs be that fingers will get scratched. A.D.  
1215.

The Buondelmonte tragedy was the spark falling on the open gunpowder,—the scratch on the finger of the fevered and unhealthy body politic; and in that sense, but in no other, I think it may be called the cause of the civil wars which followed it in Florence.

## CHAPTER IV.

Quarrel between Florence and Pisa—Erroneously attributed to a frivolous cause—The Cardinal's lapdog—Florence endeavours to avoid war—Florentine victory—War with Pistoia—The *carroccio*—Expedition against Siena—Intervention between Orvieto and Perugia—Braggadocio spirit of the mediæval Communes—Solemn treaty with Siena signed near Poggibonzi—Origin of the Order of Servites—Paving of the streets in Florence—Ponte di Rubaconte—The "*Misericordia*"—Its origin—Frederick II.—His character—His conduct towards Florence—Movement among the Ghibellines—Frederick obtains hostages from Florence—Civil war in the city—The Guelphs driven out of the city—Funeral of Rustico Marignolle—Destruction of Guelph palaces—Tower of *Guardamorto*—The Baptistry saved from destruction by Niccola Pisano.

ALTHOUGH fighting was caused in the streets of Florence, as an immediate result of the murder of Buondelmonte, and although the remarkable step taken by his family of changing their political party in consequence of that event, and declaring themselves thenceforth to be Guelphs and supporters of the popular cause, contributed to give a political significance to the crime, and to prepare the city for making it a pretext for party division, yet after the first outbreak of violence, the virulence of party feud seems to have been suspended awhile by the interest attached to, and the needs arising out of, foreign war.

In 1220 the first quarrel between Pisa and Florence arose. And the record of the fact offers to our notice another singular instance of the tendency of the historians of that time to see in trifling and superficial accidents the ultimate causes of great events, the real roots of which they should have sought far deeper below the surface. The cause



to which the misunderstanding between the two cities is attributed by the chroniclers is an absurdly frivolous one ; —worth relating only as illustrative of manners and the methods of dealing with each other practised by the governments of the great communes. The two cities quarrelled because they were jealous of each other's power and prosperity ; and it is possible enough that two neighbouring communities actuated by such feelings towards each other may have found an occasion though not a cause of quarrel even in such an incident as that related by Villani.\*

A.D.  
1220.

The Emperor Frederick II. was to be crowned in Rome on the 22nd of November, 1220, and all the cities of Italy sent embassies to do honour to the occasion. Florence and Pisa rivalled each other in the dignity and splendour of their respective representatives. Already those " Arabs of the interior " were beginning to assert their place among the wealthiest and most civilized communities of the period on no unequal footing.

Now it so happened that a great man at Rome—a cardinal, we are told ; but he is not more particularly designated—wishing to do honour to the Republic, invited the Florentine ambassadors to dinner ; on which occasion, one of them seeing a lapdog that struck his fancy, asked the cardinal to make him a present of it. The great man said he was welcome to the dog, told him to send for it at his pleasure, and thought no more about the matter. But on the following day the ambassadors of the rival Tuscan city were invited to dine with his Eminence ; and, as ill-luck would have it, one of the Pisans also took it into his head to ask the cardinal to give him the same little dog ; and the magnificent host, forgetting all about his present to the Florentine, told him

\* Book vi. chap. ii.

A.D. 1220. also that he was welcome to it. Here were the elements of a very pretty quarrel, and they were not permitted to fall to the ground.

The Florentine happening to make application first, received the dog. The Pisan insisted that it should be given up to him. The rival ambassadors met in the streets of Rome, and came to abusive words; and from words quickly to blows; on which occasion the Pisans got the better of it, because, say the Florentine writers, the Pisan embassy was accompanied by fifty Pisan soldiers. There were, however, a large number of Florentines in Rome; for besides the embassy from the city, a great many citizens had gone to be present at the coronation for their own amusement. And all these, as soon as it became known among them that Florentine citizens had been ill-treated by Pisans, and the city insulted in the persons of its ambassadors, assembled together, and "took bitter vengeance" on the men of Pisa. The latter wrote home to their community, complaining of the outrage committed on themselves, and the affront offered to Pisa. Whereupon the government of that city instantly laid hands on all the merchandise belonging to Florentine citizens to be found in Pisa; of which there happened to be at that time a considerable quantity. "For," says one writer, "The Florentines were great merchants, and imported all their merchandise in Pisan ships."\*

The Florentines sent many messages to Pisa to induce that city to restore the confiscated property, but could obtain no satisfaction. They even, as the Florentine historians all declare, in their anxiety to avoid the necessity of war, gave the Pisan government to understand, that, being more concerned for the reputation of their city in the eyes of the world, than for the value of the goods which

\* Coppo Stefani, book ii. rubr. lxvi.

had been seized, they would be contented if the community of Pisa would send a quantity of horseloads of any rubbish merely for the appearance of the thing, and to content the Florentine populace; that they would then privately compensate the merchants for their loss; and so the two communities might remain on friendly terms. They added, however, to this conciliatory message, an intimation that if these friendly proposals were not complied with, they should be obliged to declare war against Pisa. A.D.  
1222.

Such a threat on the part of the upstart community, whom Pisan merchants had not so very long ago described as "Tuscan Arabs," appeared to the older and wealthier city an excess of insolent audacity. That a community, they said, which had done nothing as yet but oppress and rob a few poor nobles, should dream of measuring itself with Pisa, seemed incredible. They were in no wise concerned to care for the reputation of Florence, they added; and would make no restitution real or apparent; and if the Florentines thought fit to come out to fight them, all they could do was to shorten their journey for them by meeting them half way.

The Florentines said no more; but sedulously set to work to prepare for a great effort. In July, 1222, they marched forth; and the Pisans as good as their word *did* come out to meet them. The armies met at a place called Castel del Bosco; and the fight lasted the whole of the long summer day. But when the sun went down, the Pisan army was thoroughly routed; many were left dead on the field; and the victors marched back to Florence bringing with them thirteen hundred prisoners, among whom were many of the principal families of Pisa.\*

"I have related thus at length this matter between the

\* Malispini, chap. cviii.; Villani, book vi. chap. ii.; Ammirato, libro primo, accresciuto ad an. 1221.



A.D.  
1228.

Pisans and the Florentines," says Villani, "that all the world may know from how small a matter began these quarrels between the two cities, which produced so much evil to both of them, and to Italy generally. All began from a dispute about a little dog; if we ought not rather to conclude that it was the devil in the form of a dog, who brought about all the misfortunes which followed."

But if the historian must needs see the operation of the foul fiend in the matter, there is no necessity to suppose him to have quitted for the purpose his usual more recognised habitat. Passions were growing strong in Florence and in Pisa, which were sure to bring about all that followed, had the Lord Cardinal's lapdog, either possessed or non-possessed by the devil, never lived.

Of course this great success against such an adversary did not tend to make the Florentines more moderate or forbearing in their dealings with other neighbours. After a few years, marked only by two or three of the usual expeditions against "castles," or villages, which had rebelled against the "Commune," Florence is found again at war with another of its more powerful neighbours, though one of very different calibre from haughty Pisa.

Pistoia was the object of the displeasure of Florence in 1228, for having injured certain smaller communes, which the latter thought fit to protect. The pushing, fighting community on the banks of the Arno, did not, on this occasion, succeed in taking the city of Pistoia; but it constrained the Pistoians to sign a treaty, which was hardly less than a submission in all respects to the will and authority of their turbulent neighbour. And this treaty was sworn to by every male inhabitant of Pistoia, from 15 to 70 years of age.\*

This expedition against Pistoia, however, is chiefly

\* Ammirato, libro primo, accresciuto ad an. 1228.

remarkable as having been the first occasion on which we find mention of that singular embodiment of the pride, pomp, circumstance of mediæval Italian warfare, the "*Carroccio*." The *carroccio* was a massive car, or platform rather, on four low wheels. On this were erected two lofty masts, from which hung out the great red and white standard of the Commonwealth. The whole machine was painted the colour of vermilion; and was drawn by the largest and finest pair of oxen that could be found, covered with housings of the same colour. These animals were kept at the expense of the community, and were never used for any other purpose. As soon as war was proclaimed, the leading nobles and captains of the city went in solemn state to the store-house of the church of St. John, where the machine was kept; and taking it thence, brought it to the market-place,\* and there placed it on a certain spot marked by a stone with the figure of a wheel engraved on it.† Then the *carroccio* was solemnly given into the charge of a chosen band of the bravest youths of the city, whose sacred duty it was to guard and defend it in battle at all hazards and to the last extremity, "as though it were something divine," says the historian Ammirato.‡ A second car went to the field in company with it, bearing on a lofty belfry the "*martinello*," as the great war bell was called. One month before the army took the field this bell was hoisted in the tower of a small church,§ close by the station of the *carroccio* in the market, where it was rung day and night during that time. Then it was taken down and hung in the portable belfry of the car, which

A.D.  
1228.

\* That at the present day known as the Mercato Nuovo, where there is now a square portico.

† It was the same stone on which bankrupts were compelled to sit publicly, with that part of their person in contact with the stone, naked, as a punishment for not meeting their engagements.

‡ Libro primo accresciuto ad an. 1228.

§ Santa Maria.

A.D.  
1235.

accompanied the other bearing the standard. This bell, says one of the older chroniclers, was rung day and night for a month before taking the field, for no other purpose but this,—that the enemy against whom Florence was about to march might have abundant notice to look well to its defence.\*

The seven years, from 1228 to 1235, seem to have been spent in an almost continual series of desultory expeditions, chiefly against the Sienese and their allies. The first motive which gave rise to all this, was a breach of treaty by Siena in commencing fresh hostilities against Montepulciano. The Florentine host marched the *carroccio* on to the Sienese territory, ravaging and destroying everything as they passed onwards. They took and razed to the ground the strong "*castello*" of Querciagrossa, "sending all the inhabitants to Florence;" on which the historian, Ammirato, writing in the sixteenth century, remarks, that on this as on many other occasions it seemed as if the hatred of the combatants of those days was stronger against the walls than against the men who defended them; and that in all those wars there is no record or tradition of many lives having been lost. And many close observers of the manners of those ages, he adds, have been led to think that all these frequent destructions of strongholds and villages were not due to any hatred against their inhabitants, or even to the mere love of warfare and adventure, so much as for the sake of increasing the strength and population of their own city, by removing thither and making Florentines of people, who, left where they were, would have remained enemies of Florence.†

Nevertheless many of the exploits of the Florentine

\* Coppo Stefani, book ii. rubr. lxxii.

† Ammirato, libro primo accresciuto ad an. 1232.



army, during these years, seem to bear the impress of a love of adventure, rather than of any other more serious motive. They wandered away far to the south of Siena into the Val d'Orcia, and as far as Radicofani, a good half-way to Rome, destroying fortified villages and castles. They took the part of Orvieto against Perugia, which latter city applied to Rome for assistance to withstand them. We find them also on the coast of the Maremma taking possession of Port Ercole, and other places in that vicinity; enterprises which, however, may have been inspired by more of political purpose than useless sieges of Siena, which seem to have been prompted really by that school-boy-like spirit of half-sportive braggadocio and bullying, which seems to have often entered so largely into the dealings and sentiments of these mediæval communes towards each other. They would erect tall masts bearing derisive and insulting emblems within sight of an enemy's city walls. They would discharge against them from their engines absurd missiles, intended to ridicule and taunt their adversaries, rather than hurt them. We hear of their hurling, in this spirit, a live ass against the city of Siena. Once they pushed their attack up to the gates of the city, broke into the suburb, defended by an outer gate, and took a vast quantity of prisoners, of whom they retained thirteen hundred men, after liberating the women and children. They were all carried in triumph to Florence; but were shortly afterwards set at liberty,—much as in the school-boy's game called "prisoner's base." They destroyed a vast number\* of fortified places in the territory of Siena, in this one expedition; and the traces of those thirteenth-century incursions may still be seen in the remarkable quantity of ruined towers

A.D.  
1235.

\* Coppo Stefani, book ii. rubr. lxxii. sag. xix.; Villani, book vi. chap. xi. sag. xliii.

A.D. 1235. and castles which stud the district around that city, the very names of many of which have perished and been forgotten.

At last the Sienese sued for peace, which was granted on moderate terms, the Cardinal of Preneste having been sent by Pope Gregory IX. to preside over the reconciliation. The terms agreed to were, that the Sienese should rebuild the walls of Montepulciano, which they had destroyed, should promise to abstain from molesting Montalcino in any way, and should restore to Orvieto all the conquests it had made in the territory of that commune.

The scene of this solemn treaty must have been a no less picturesque than characteristic bit of the life of these days. It took place on the last day of June, in the year 1235, in the tent of the Podestà of Florence, which was pitched in the midst of the army encamped in the neighbourhood of Poggibonzi. That region is to the present day richly wooded with oak; and doubtless was so to a still greater degree in the thirteenth century. We must picture to ourselves the whole of the victorious Florentine host bivouacking among these woods, and the palladium *carroccio* with its attendant *martinello*, which had accompanied the army in its wanderings through the distant districts of the Val d'Orcia, and the mountains in the neighbourhood of Radiofani, drawn up in the immediate vicinity of the Podestà's tent. The company assembled within, or in front of it, was of no ordinary state and dignity. First there was his Eminence the Cardinal of Preneste, acting as Papal legate. Then there was Messer Compagnone del Poltrono of Mantua, the Podestà of Florence for the year, who with Ubertino del Gesso the syndic for an assessor, was appointed the Florentine commissioner for signing the treaty of peace. There were Messer Bernardino de' Pii of Modena, the Podestà of Siena, the Bishop of that city, and Messer Buonagrazia their syndic,

as commissioners on the part of Siena. Besides these there were Pagano, Bishop of Volterra, Hildebrand, Bishop of Fiesole, Ramiri, Bishop of Orvieto, with many other prelates, who were there, one does not well understand in what character or for what purpose, save that of contributing to the solemnity of the occasion, and gratifying the propensity of the Church for thrusting not a finger,—for one finger can pull out no plums,—but a finger and thumb at least into every pie that was going. Of course there were blessings and *Te Deums* in abundance. Of course the peace thus solemnly made was declared to be eternal; and of course this eternity was bounded by the occurrence of the first cause of fresh quarrel between the two cities, which happened about seventeen years afterwards.

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But while the more active and restless spirits in Florence were thus engaged in a sort of civic joint-stock knight-errantry expedition, there were citizens of a different temperament at home bent on other methods of making for themselves a reputation and a place in the world's history.

Few visitors of Florence will have failed to observe, or to remember, the remarkable pine-covered peak of Apennine, with its convent walls gleaming out from among the dark fir-woods, when the sun touches them, which shuts in the horizon of the Valdarno to the north, far behind and above Fiesole, and bounds the view from the opposite high ground of St. Miniato. And most of those, who have marked it, will have asked, and been told that the name of that noticeable convent-topped hill is Monte Senario. To that solitude, seven Florentine artizans retired in the year 1233, to devote themselves to the special service of the Virgin Mary. Why the Virgin should be more efficaciously served on the top of Monte Senario, than in the city of Florence, it would be hard to say. But the notion



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commended itself to other minds ; and the result was, that from the beginning so made, grew the famous Society of Servites, or servants of the Virgin Mary, a branch of the Augustine Order, which recognises that mountain convent as its cradle and chief. To this order Fra Paolo Sarpi belonged. The names of the seven founders have been preserved, but would be of small interest to an English reader.

But neither did the wars prevent Florence from finding time and means for attending to more practical objects. About this period the city was, for the first time, paved after that curious fashion which has attracted the attention of strangers up to the present day ; but the last specimens of which are now rapidly disappearing in the progress of material improvement. It is very evident that that peculiar method of laying down huge irregularly-shaped flagstones, accurately and with much ingenuity fitted to suit the many-angled irregularities of each other, must have been an inheritance from the traditions of the old Etruscan workmen, specimens of whose walls, constructed after the same fashion, and even some few fragments of paving, are still extant, to testify to the similarity of the workmanship. It is curious to find an industrial process holding its ground in a peculiar locality, while the change has been so very great around it, for some two or three thousand years. But at last the nineteenth century, intolerant of local peculiarities even in the matter of laying down a pavement, is putting an end to the old Etruscan method, and paving Florence with rectangular stones like other places.

About the same time, a third bridge was built over the Arno in Florence, that above the Ponte Vecchio, called originally, “di Rubaconte,” after Messer Rubaconte di Mundello of Milan, who was Podestà when it was built ; but known better at a later period as the “Ponte alle

Grazie," from a little chapel at the foot of it dedicated to *Santa Maria delle Grazie*. A.D.  
1240.

To about the same period belongs the first foundation of that very peculiar and characteristic Florentine institution, the "Compagnia della Misericordia." No one who has ever been in Florence need be reminded that the "Misericordia" still exists in all the striking peculiarity of its mediæval costume and practice; and that the dismal-looking processions of the brethren may be daily seen there, passing through the streets on their melancholy errands of mercy and charity. More remnants of the life of the centuries preceding the sixteenth have survived in Italy than in other countries, in which progress has been more active; and many such have very recently perished there also. But this still extant and living institution is by far the most remarkable and strangely picturesque fragment of that old life still remaining. And the circumstances of its foundation, as they are detailed in an ancient manuscript in gothic letter, copied by the Reverend Lorenzo Fici in the year 1605, and subsequently published in a history of the Misericordia,\* are so illustrative of the Florentine life of that time, that they are of more value than the narratives of a hundred military expeditions against forgotten castles.

It was in the year 1240, "when the city of Florence and its citizens were intently occupied in the business of trading in, or rather of manufacturing cloths, which by reason of their quality and excellence were sought by all the cities in the world, to such a degree that two annual fairs were held, one at St. Simon's and one at Martinmas, to each of which all the richest merchants in Italy came, and sales were made to the amount at each fair of from

\* *Istoria dell' Oratorio e della Venerabile Arciconfraternità della Misericordia*, scritta da Placido Landani. A new edition by the Abate Pietro Pillori. Firenze, 1843, p. 31.

A.D. 1240. fifteen to sixteen millions of florins," that the first beginning of the Misericordia was made in this manner. All this vast woollen trade gave work to a great number of porters, who most of them waited for their jobs on the Piazza of the Baptistery, that being the place assigned to them by the City. "Now in that piazza there was a cellar, which is believed to have belonged to the Adimari; but inasmuch as it always stood open, in consequence of having been flooded by the inundations of the Arno,\* the porters used to take possession of the place as their refuge from the rain and the cold, while waiting for a job; and they used to have a fire there, and play at dice, when work was slack, which was rarely the case." There used to be some seventy or eighty porters lounging there; and it happened that one Piero di Luca Borsi, an elderly man, and the head of the whole gang, was afflicted by the quantity of ill language and blasphemy which was frequently heard among them. So he induced them all to agree, that every man who should be guilty of using any blasphemous expression, should be fined by putting a *crazia*—now equal to two-thirds of a penny—into a box provided for the purpose. In process of time a very considerable sum was thus collected. And then good old Piero proposed and induced his companions to consent to spend it in providing six litters, one for each ward of the city, and to appoint every week two of their number to each litter, for the purpose of carrying poor sick persons to the hospitals, or those who met with sudden accidents, or who died suddenly or were killed in the streets. And that was the humble origin of the society which became so

\* It is a curious fact, proved by recent examinations of the locality, that the soil of the *Piazza del Duomo* and the *Piazza* of the Baptistery was in the thirteenth century at least two feet lower than it is at present. And in the Archives of the Commune there is a record of money voted in 1288 for raising and levelling the brick pavement of the area.



celebrated in Florentine story, and has lasted more than six hundred years. A.D.  
1248.

But evil days were at hand for Florence. The energy and indomitable perseverance of Frederick II. had—not by any means conquered, but had cowed for a time the Church and the Church party in Italy; and Innocent IV. was a fugitive from Rome at Lyons. There is very much that is interesting in the history of this Frederick II. and his struggles with the Church. And as usual in the case of those who were the opponents of priestly power, in days when the pen was held almost exclusively by priests, there is difficulty in getting at the truth, through the thick and manifold covering of falsehood and calumny which the ecclesiastical historians have thrown over his entire story and character. The son of a nun, brought from her cloister by Papal dispensation, to be married to his father the Emperor, Henry VI., he was from his cradle the nurseling and pupil of the Church, which seems to have thought that if it could succeed in getting a whelp of that dangerous Imperial brood, which had caused it so much trouble, into its own hands, to be brought up tame on its own spoon-meat, it would accomplish the great object of having in the first place a son who might be set up as an opponent, and made a weapon of offence against his father, and ultimately an Emperor, who would be its own tool and creature. But the experiment turned out as unfortunately as most of the recorded attempts to mould and fashion a human being to a certain end from his cradle upwards ever have done. Of all the Emperors, the bitterest and most dangerous to the Church was this Frederick II. He seems to have been a man endowed with many great and brilliant qualities both of intellect and character. But he knew the Church, not only as his ancestors had done before him, by experience of its encroaching tyranny, but by that intimate acquaintance with its real character which was

A.D.  
1248. only to be acquired by one who had studied it in its own home, and in a measure observed it behind the scenes. The consequence was that Frederick was not a good Catholic, and that excommunications and Papal anathemas passed over him, as far as he was personally concerned, as harmless as water over a duck's back. It was a dangerous scheme, that notion of breeding an Emperor, though there have been plenty of crowned heads with whom it might have answered; but Frederick was not of the right sort for the experiment.

But whatever view might be formed of Frederick's character and of his political conduct, by an historian of his life and reign, he can hardly be regarded favourably when looked at from within the walls of Florence; and all, or almost all, the Florentine writers are bitter against him, and adopt the tone of the Church in their strictures on his character. It could hardly be otherwise; and yet it is scarcely just to lay at his door the responsibility of the evils which he helped to cause, or to bring to a crisis in Florence. Florentines have cause enough to hate the Imperial power; but it really became fatal to them, and really merited all their imprecations only when it was wielded by an Emperor who was the ally and the accomplice of the Church, instead of being its enemy. Frederick in fighting his up-hill fight against his implacable adversary, had to strengthen his influence, and gain adherents to his cause in every part of Italy, as he best might; and for this purpose he availed himself of the party feuds in Florence which it will be unjust to accuse him of causing, though he is fairly chargeable with having fomented them.

In 1248 Frederick had had sentence of excommunication and deprivation fulminated against him by Innocent IV. But Innocent was a fugitive at Lyons, and, despite his anathemas, the Imperial party in Italy was in the ascendant. The sure and immediate consequence of this

was, that the Ghibelline nobles in Florence took heart, and began to be turbulent and overbearing. "But," says an historian by no means friendly to Frederick, "it was more from party spirit and sectarian feeling preconceived than from caring for either the Pope or the Emperor, that the minds of the Florentines were inflamed."\* And he goes on to relate how, at an assembly of the leaders of the Ghibellines in the church of St. Pietro Scheraggio,† which was in the immediate neighbourhood of the Uberti Palace, and was a common place of meeting for the Ghibelline party, it was urged that, considering the position in which the Emperor stood towards the Church, it would not sound creditable to make "the Emperor!" their cry in opposition to the cry of "the Church!"‡ And it was determined, therefore, that the rallying cry should be "Viva parte Ghibellina!"—and the other party, equally well inclined to forget all about the Pope, and make the quarrel a purely Florentine one, abandoned the cry of "Church," and adopted that of "Parte Guelfa!"

While the fire was thus smouldering and ready to burst into open flame in the city, Frederick sent to Florence, as to the other cities of Tuscany, professing a desire to maintain peace within their walls, and demanding for this purpose hostages from either party. Had he asked for them from one party alone, says the historian,§ they would not have been sent, as the Emperor well knew; but as the demand seemed an impartial one, the hostages were sent to the Imperial Vicar at San Miniato, where those of the Guelphs were thrown into prison, and those of the Ghibel-

\* Coppo Stefani, book ii. rubr. lxxxii.

† It exists no longer; having been destroyed to make way for the building of the *Ufizi*. It stood on the spot now occupied by the portion of that building nearest to the Palazzo Pubblico. The Uberti Palace, as has been before noted, stood exactly on the other side of the Palazzo.

‡ "Non era onore di dire contra la Chiesa."—Coppo Stefani, *loc. cit.*

§ Coppo Stefani, *loc. cit.*



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lines allowed to return to Florence. At the same time the Emperor sent a private message to the head of the great Ghibelline house of Uberti, who was the leader of all that faction, urging them to rise at once, promising to send them assistance, and telling them that now was such an opportunity as might not come again, for finally crushing their opponents.

Less than this would have sufficed to raise the war-cry in every street of the city. The towers of the nobles were manned, barricades were thrown up, and a desperate contest ensued. The Ghibellines had four principal strongholds in the city, the chief of which was the palace of the Uberti, and around that the fight was the hottest. The Guelphs were at a disadvantage in consequence of the stratagem which had deprived them of several of their best leaders. But the struggle was maintained with tenacious obstinacy for some days, till on a Sunday morning Frederick of Antioch, as he was called, a natural son of the Emperor, arrived in the city with sixteen hundred German horsemen. Nevertheless the Guelphs, gathering their forces to one point of the city, stood at bay, and prolonged their resistance, fighting with desperate valour till the Wednesday morning, when at length they yielded.\*

But in order to estimate duly the desperation of this defence, it is needful to understand aright what was involved in defeat. This fighting against men of the same race, and fellow-citizens, every one of whom was personally known to each of his opponents, and probably personally hated, was a very different thing from the half tournament-like expeditions against other cities. In that case there was victory and glory, or defeat and mortification; in either case a peace for the nonce, and a return home. At the very worst, loss of life on the field from an unlucky

\* Malispini, chap. cxxxii.; Villani, book vi. chap. xxxiii.; Coppo Stefani, book ii. rubr. lxxxii.

arrow was nothing more than men have to meet and are wont to brave. But in the party warfare of the cities death in the fight was by far the least evil that could happen to one of the defeated party. In those contests it was indeed *Væ victis!* The lot of Adam after the fall was the doom of the conquered. Men, women, and children, fathers, sons, wives, sisters, babies, of the vanquished faction, or at least of all the nobles and leaders of that side, had to go forth from their homes, leaving them and their property to the rage of the conqueror, driven forth from the city gates into the world penniless and homeless exiles. This was what now, for the first time, happened to the Guelphs; and it may well be believed that they fought hard ere they bent their necks to it. A.D.  
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One strikingly picturesque incident is recorded as having happened on this occasion of the first exile of the Guelphs from the city.

While desperately fighting on that last fatal morning, Messer Rustico Marignolle, one of the principal chieftains of the Guelphs, was killed by an arrow which struck him in the face. He had fought with conspicuous bravery throughout the contest, and his loss contributed much to the final defeat of his party. That same night the Guelphs were to leave the city, and the distress, the confusion, the hurry of that last day may be imagined. But if the body of the fallen leader had been left to the mercy of the victors, it would, as his friends well knew, be subjected to every sort of insult and outrage. So the Guelphs determined, amid all the difficulties of those last hours, to give their chieftain decent burial. There was little time for ecclesiastical rites. A strong party of the leading chieftains carried a bier to the place where he had fallen, and placing him on it in his armour as he fell, raised it to their shoulders, and escorted by all their best men in full armour, carried the body to St. Lorenzo. The procession,

A.D. 1248. says one of the historians, was more like a military triumph than a funeral. Instead of church banners preceding it, there were the battle standards of the party; instead of wax torches the gleam of swords and spears; instead of chaunting priests the clank of armed men.\* In this manner they carried him to St. Lorenzo, and so hastily buried him in a hurriedly made grave; and there was not a man, says the historian, who did not feel as he stood by that grave, that the lot of him who was placed in it was very far preferable to that of the survivors, who, with their wives and children, were about to go forth homeless wanderers into the world that night. The place where this memorable interment took place is not known, for as soon as the Guelphs had gone, the canons of St. Lorenzo hurriedly transferred the body to another grave, for fear lest it should be disinterred by the Ghibellines.†

It was the 2nd of February on which the Guelphs left the city; and no sooner were they out of the walls than the vengeful work of destroying their homes began. No less than thirty-eight large mansions were destroyed, besides others of lesser note.‡ It was then that the magnificent mansion of the Tosinghi, of which such wonderful things are recorded, was razed to the ground. It stood near the present "Mercato Vecchio," and was commonly called "*Il Palazzo*," as being the only building then in Florence deserving of the name. It was ninety *braccia* high (about 170 feet), and had an isolated tower by the side of it, an hundred and thirty *braccia* in height. The façade was composed of four ranges of arched windows, with marbled columns between each; and the tower was circular, with ranges of marble columns one above the other, after the fashion of the tower at Pisa.

\* Ammirato, libro primo accresciuto ad an. 1249.

† Villani, book vi. chap. xxxiii.

‡ Coppo Stefani, book ii. rubr. lxxxiii.



“And the beauty of it was such,” says Coppo Stefani, A.D.  
1248.  
“that it would have sufficed for the residence of an emperor.”\*

Another deed of wanton Vandalism which was committed by the Ghibellines on this occasion is yet more characteristic of the kind of feeling which existed between the two rival parties, and is too curious to be omitted.

Exactly at the corner of the long new street which now leads from the Piazza del Duomo to the Piazza del Popolo, on the spot on which the beautiful little oratory of the ancient foundling hospital called the Bigallo now stands, there was then a magnificent and lofty tower, an hundred and twenty *braccia* high, belonging to the Adimari family, and called the “*Guardamorto*” tower, because, as the church of St. John, then the cathedral, now the baptistery, immediately in front of it was the principal burying-place of the citizens, the tower was thus said to “watch the dead.” This tower the Ghibellines determined to destroy. But that which has been visited by the reprobation of every writer from that day to this, was the intention of causing the fall of the tower to destroy the venerable cathedral beneath it. The church of St. Giovanni was the meeting-place of the Guelphs, as that of St. Pietro Scheraggio was of the Ghibellines; and for no reason save this the latter were bent on its destruction. Not even in those days, however, did they dare to compass such an aim openly and avowedly. The plan therefore was to cause the tower so to fall as to crush the church beneath it; and this infamous task was intrusted to Niccola Pisano, the celebrated sculptor and architect. The plan adopted was to cut away the foundations of the tower on the side nearest the church, propping it the while with short upright timbers, to which fire was to be set when all was ready.

\* Coppo Stefani, *loc. cit.*

A.D. 1248. These preparations were made accordingly ; but Niccola, having more of the artist than the Ghibelline in him, so managed his undermining, and his props, and his fire, that the tower fell clear of the church into the Piazza, and the fine old baptistery, where so many generations of Florentines had been baptised and lay buried, was spared.\*

\* Villani, book vi. chap. xxxiv. ; Coppo Stefani, *loc. cit.* ; Ammirato *loc. cit.* ; Osservatore Fiorentino, vol. i. p. 121.

## CHAPTER V.

Indestructibility of Italian parties—Mitigations of the misery of the Guelph exiles—The Ghibellines attack Capraia—Guelph traitor—Ghibellines attack Montevarchi—Are defeated—Result of the defeat in Florence—Rising of the people—Popular constitution—Demolition of the towers of the nobles—Tidings of the Emperor Frederick's death—Peace made between the parties of the people—Expedition against Pistoia—Ghibelline treason—Ghibellines driven out of the city—Ubalдини chastised—Second expedition against Pistoia—Assistance sent to Orvieto—Ghibellines restored to Arezzo—Pisa attacks Lucca—Manfred, son of Frederick II.—Lucca, how regarded by Florence—Pisan army defeated—Negotiations with regard to Castel Mutrone—Aldobrandino Ottobuoni—Ghibelline outrage—Prosperity of Florence—Ghibelline attempts to recover their position in the city—Rising of the people—Destruction of the Uberti palace—Execution of Ghibellines—The Ghibellines leave the city—Their palaces destroyed—Abbot of Vallombrosa killed—Florence under interdict—Ghibellines in Siena—They seek aid from Manfred—Farinata degli Uberti—Florentines march against Siena—Ghibellines send a second time to Manfred—The people of Florence insist on fighting, against the advice of the nobles—Cece de' Gherardini—Popular arrogance—Battle of Montaperti—Great defeat of the Florentine army and the Guelphs—Montaperti still remembered in Siena—Anecdotes—Effects of the defeat at Florence.

FREDERICK the son of the Emperor quitted Florence when the work of driving out the Guelphs had been accomplished, taking with him some of the Ghibelline chiefs who had entered into his service. But he left eight hundred men-at-arms in the city to support the Ghibelline faction, and complete the work by hunting out the Guelph exiles from their retreat, and finally extirpating the party in Tuscany.

But this was a thing not to be so readily accomplished as the young German prince might have supposed. Indeed,



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nothing in the history of the wars and party contests of those ages strikes a modern reader as more remarkable than the indestructible vitality and speedy resurrection of conquered parties and communities. So to manage the affairs of a people, and so to strike as that the misery, the loss, and the suffering of warfare should at least be not uselessly undergone, that some decisive result may follow, and some more or less final arrangement be attained by the struggle—this seems to be a modern improvement in the art of managing international quarrels. The mediæval contests in Italy were never final. However extreme the rancour and violence of the victorious party, it appears never to have been sufficiently so to crush their adversaries efficiently and thoroughly. The victors seem always to have done as careful gardeners do, who in gathering their produce, take care to leave a sufficient number of plants for the production of seed that shall renew the crop. And in reading the chronicles of these never-ending still-beginning struggles, nothing seems more surprising than the quantity of killing it takes to kill any party, sect, or community; or rather, the inefficacy of any amount of killing to compass that end. We read accounts of slaughter, exile, imprisonment, confiscation, spoliation, destruction, and despair enough, it might be supposed, utterly to extinguish and extirpate the objects of them. But in an incredibly short space of time we find the shattered, discouraged, crushed party still alive, recovering its strength, and soon ready to try another fall with its old adversary, and probably to succeed in reversing the previous decision of fortune.

Nothing could seem more deplorable and hopeless than the condition of the Guelphs as they are described by the historians, driven forth as we have seen from the city, and their homes and property destroyed. But as in the operations of nature, so almost always in the arrangements

of a social system, there are compensations which prevent any action or any blow from exercising all the force, that seems to those living under different social circumstances necessarily to belong to it. One of these compensating influences in the mediæval Italian life was the intense feeling and unrestricted admission of *solidarity* between all the members of families, of communities, of parties. A father or a brother did not feel it to be strange, unreasonable, or unjust that he should suffer in life or goods for the crime of a son or a brother. When the Pisans seized the goods of Florentine merchants in Pisa, because other Florentines had beaten other Pisans in Rome, the proceeding did not appear to anybody unwarrantable or other than could be expected; and when the Florentine Guelphs, beaten, ruined, and homeless, went forth into exile, the homes, the support and the assistance of their partisans throughout Tuscany were open to them.

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Many went to Montevarchi in the upper Valdarno, and many, especially the principal leaders of the party, threw themselves into the strong Guelph fortress of Capraia in the lower Valdarno, about fifteen miles from Florence. The Ghibellines went out to attack the latter; and the Emperor, who was at Fucecchio, a small town on the Arno about half way to Pisa, being unwilling to come to Florence, say the historians, because the astrologers had foretold that he should die there,\* sent forces to their assistance; but Capraia was too strong. The Guelphs defended themselves vigorously, though hard pressed by want of food. They held out, however, and would have obtained favourable terms, had not one Giovanni del Tosco, a shoemaker, who had been a prominent Guelph partisan among the people, and had fled from the city with the leaders of the party, being enraged at not being invited to

\* And he did die at *Firenzuola*, a town in Apulia, so that they were not so far wrong, says Coppo Stefani, book ii. rubr. lxxxvi.

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be present at a council held by the chiefs in their beleaguered stronghold, ran to the gate and called to one of the besiegers to go to the Vicar (who was, it would seem, conducting the siege on the part of the Emperor), and tell him to grant no terms, for that the place could not hold out a day longer ; and in fact, on the next day the Guelphs were compelled to yield at discretion. Several of the principal prisoners were taken to the Emperor, who being about to return into the kingdom of Naples, took them with him, and according to the Florentine historians, treated them with the most revolting cruelty, putting out the eyes of all of them, and condemning many to death. "This sort of thing," says Coppo Stefani, "is the dower of partisanship. These are the delights that spring from party divisions. And assuredly my belief is, that he who is a violent partisan, either Guelph or Ghibelline, cannot gain his salvation. God forgive me if I am in error ; and if I say wrong, let it be as though I had not said it, or written it."\*

The Ghibellines attacked their adversaries also in the other principal place of their retreat, Montevarchi ; but there the event turned out very differently. A strong body of the party in the ascendant, together with the band of German soldiers who had been left by Frederick in Florence, were at "Figghine," as Dante and the old chroniclers call it, but as it is now written Figline, a small town in the immediate neighbourhood of Montevarchi, preparing to attack the Guelphs in the latter place. But these, instead of waiting for the attack, sallied out one dark night, succeeded in completely surprising the enemy, and massacred nearly the whole of them.

The news of this notable defeat and disaster produced a most powerful revulsion of feeling in Florence, and very important events followed from it.

\* Coppo Stefani, book ii. rubr. lxxxvi.



No sooner had the defeat and exile of the Guelphs left the city entirely in the hands of the Ghibelline nobles, than they began to impose new taxes, and to treat the city, as was the natural tendency of that party, after the fashion of lords dealing with their vassals. The Ghibelline nobles were at all times hated by the populace of Florence, even by those lower strata of it, which were hardly high enough in the social scale to participate in the enmities of their superiors. And their present mode of treating the people was not calculated to make them more popular. The Ghibelline massacre at Figline took place on the 20th of September, 1250; and immediately on tidings of it reaching Florence, the attitude and the aspect of the people became menacing. It was not however till the 20th of October that the popular discontent rose to the overflowing point. On the morning of that day there were large tumultuous meetings of the people, first at the Badia, as a church and monastery not far from the Piazza del Popolo was called; and then, because they were there too close to the houses of the Uberti, at Santa Croce. The Uberti, who would not hear of any measures of reconciliation or moderation, armed their adherents in haste, and went out to disperse the meeting by force. But the numbers increased so rapidly, and the appearance of the people was so menacing, that the haughty Ghibellines withdrew\* into their fortified houses, and remained "in great fear"† all that day. The people gathering courage as the day went on and they found themselves uninterfered with, advanced from mere vague discontent to organized revolution; and before they separated, agreed to and decreed, by no other authority than the popular will, various changes in the constitution, which exercised an important influence on the future history of the city.

A.D.  
1250.

\* Ammirato, libro ii. ad an. 1250.

† Coppo Stefani, book ii. rubr. lxxxix.

A.D.  
1250.

The principal scope of the changes introduced aimed at and accomplished nothing less than a complete politico-military organization of the body of the people. The first step was to declare the Podestà deposed, and to appoint a captain of the people—“*Capitano del Popolo*”—in his place. The chief magistrate so named was to be entrusted not only with the military captaincy of the people, but also with the judicial functions of the Podestà, and with those that at a later date were attributed to the Gonfaloniere. But although the office of Podestà did not remain long in abeyance, and in 1293 a part of the powers of the *Capitano del Popolo* were assigned to the then created Gonfaloniere, still the Captain of the People continued to be a position of high importance in the Commonwealth. Under him captains (*caporali*) of the six wards, three or four to each, so that the entire number was twenty, were appointed; and the whole able-bodied population of the city divided into twenty companies, according to the districts which they inhabited, were placed under their orders, and were bound to appear in arms beneath their ward standards whenever summoned by these officers. A large tocsin bell was placed on the “Tower of the Lion,” at the sound of which the whole of the twenty companies were to assemble in arms. Twelve men of the people chosen two from each of the six wards, and called “*Anziani del Popolo*”—Elders of the People—were appointed as a council to assist the Capitano. And all these arrangements were agreed to, perfected, and carried into execution, by that spontaneous and anarchic meeting of the people, on that twentieth day of October!\*

And the work so accomplished within the hours of that short autumn day stood and held its ground, and took root in the city; surely a marvellous manifestation of that

\* Malispini, chap. cxxxvii.; Villani, book vi. chap. xxxix.; Coppo Stefani, book ii. rubr. lxxxix.; Ammirato, book ii. ad an. 1250.

genius for organization, which I have said was to a remarkable degree characteristic of the mediæval municipal communities. And surely that alarm of the Ghibelline chieftains shut up in their fortresses, while these things were being done, was not without cause—not without ample cause for misgivings, not only respecting the immediate upshot of the rising, but, if they had any skill to read the signs of the times, as regarded the future of themselves and their party in the city. A populace armed, militarily organized under ward-captains of its own choosing, and a head captain equally of their own choice, with the rope of a big tocsin bell in his hand, at the first pull of which every man of those stout wool-combers, and weavers, and dyers, and porters, and their peers were ready to troop forth armed and marshalled under their respective banners, each with its well-known device, into the streets and squares in their bands and companies at a minute's notice,—surely this was not a comfortable spectacle for any aristocracy, Ghibelline or other. Surely this was a portentous and disgusting spectacle for any lover of law and order. But no love of disorder and anarchy for disorder's sake was ever among the vices of the people of this “most republican of republics.” Vices enough they had; but not that; the organizing instinct was too strong within them. And on the present occasion, being thus left to themselves, with the Guelph leaders in exile and the Ghibellines shut up in their city-castles, the people behaved not only with moderation, but with far more of political prudence and wisdom than the leaders of either party among their social superiors had manifested.

They decreed and executed the demolition of all the towers of the nobles' fortresses above the height of fifty *braccia*. Having reduced those that exceeded that measure, they destroyed no other building, notwithstanding the examples which had been given them by the Ghibellines

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1250.



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1251.

when the city was in their power. On the contrary, bent rather on providing for the future than on avenging the past, and on embellishing and improving the city rather than on laying it waste, they laid the foundations of that Palazzo del Podestà, which was to be the embodiment of the majesty of the Commonwealth, and which has been the admiration of so many subsequent generations.

In all respects their conduct was more than moderate towards the Ghibelline nobles. They strove to bring about a reconciliation between them and the Guelph exiles; and much debate with this view had taken place in the city. The Ghibellines in the position in which they were did not dare to reject all such proposals; but they temporised and made delays; and up to the end of the year nothing had been done in the matter.\* About the middle of December,† finding themselves hard pressed, and still exceedingly unwilling to accept any such pacification of the city as the people were striving to bring about, they sent privately one of the Uberti to their patron, the Emperor, to ask for advice and assistance. But on the 20th, their messenger returned with the tidings that the Emperor had died on the 13th. On this news becoming known in the city, the people took the matter into their own hands, and “half by force as it were,”‡ peace was made; and on the 8th of January the Guelphs returned into the city.

But the peace thus made, as might have been anticipated, was but of short duration. One of the first cares of the city after the Guelphs had returned to it, was naturally enough that of causing the members of their party who had been driven out of neighbouring cities by the same general political aspects of the times which had caused their own exile, to be restored. And an expedition against Pistoia was determined on for this purpose. But the

\* Coppo Stefani, book ii. rubr. xcii.

+ 1250.

† Coppo Stefani, *loc. cit.*

Ghibellines thinking that they saw here an opportunity of undoing all that had been done, and regaining once more their ascendancy, privately encouraged the Pistoia people to resist, promising that they would obtain for them efficacious assistance from without, and that they with all their adherents in the city would abstain from joining in the expedition. Their plan was, to seize the city when thus left as it were alone in it, to ensure a defeat of their Guelph fellow-citizens at the hands of the citizens of Pistoia, to shut the city gates against them, when returning in confusion from their rout, and thus to find themselves completely restored to their old ascendancy.

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The plot was well contrived ; but it so happened that all their provisions were frustrated by the event. The Guelphs, notwithstanding the sudden defection of their fellow-citizens at the last moment, were completely victorious at Pistoia ; and some of the prisoners they brought back with them revealed the whole of the plot. The consequence was, that several of the leading Ghibelline families were driven out of the city ; and the fruitful seed was thus sown of future troubles and reprisals.

It is impossible, however, to avoid admitting that on this occasion the Guelph party seem to have wished to act with moderation, to bring about a possibility of living at peace with their political adversaries within the same city walls, and to lay a foundation for the future tranquillity and security of the city. It is very observable, moreover, that this moderate and wise policy was not apparently due so much to the Guelph partisans, as to the body of the citizens, who, though in a general way Guelph in their tendencies and sympathies, were not, it may easily be imagined, violent partisans after the fashion of the leaders and prominent men of the party who had suffered for their cause, and had come into personal contact with, and were therefore animated by personal enmity against, the leaders

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of the other faction. And it will be remembered, that the Guelphs on their return to the city in the early part of 1251 did not owe that return to any victory of their own. For though they inflicted a defeat on the Ghibellines, as we have seen, at Figline, that was in October, 1250. And they did not return to the city till the beginning of 1251, being then brought back by the people, who had, during the intervening time, been striving to induce the Ghibellines to make peace with the exiles, but had been unable to prevail with them to do so, until the Ghibellines were discouraged and cowed by the news of the Emperor's death on the 20th of December. All this time the city had been in the hands of the people, organized; as we have seen, according to the scheme arranged by themselves on that memorable 20th of October, while the Guelphs were in exile, and the Ghibellines shut up in their palaces, and passing the day "in great fear." Had the party leaders on either side remained so disposed of for evermore, there might have been better hope for the future fortunes of the city. As it was, the Guelphs, who were the popular party, and had a much closer connection with the people, and much more of the popular element among them, did appear inclined to moderate and conciliatory councils. And it was Ghibelline treason, and a Ghibelline attempt to set their heels once again both on Guelphs and populace, that led to new proscriptions, and destroyed all hope of concord in the city.

Only a few of the leading and most incorrigibly hostile Ghibellines had been exiled in consequence of the treason plotted on the occasion of the expedition against Pistoia; and they were shortly pardoned and permitted to return to the city.\* Nevertheless, although it would appear that the wish and purpose of the city government at this time

\* Coppo Stefani, book ii. rubr. cxiii.



was really and honestly to be moderate, conciliatory, and impartial, the next few years were occupied in expeditions to put down and reduce to obedience various Ghibelline nobles in the country, and several towns in which Ghibelline politics were in the ascendant. The Ubaldini in the Mugello\* were brought to their allegiance. Poggibonzi, which had been a thorn in the flesh to Florence ever since the foundation of it under the circumstances related in a former chapter, and the strong position of Volterra, were reduced and taken possession of. A second expedition against Pistoia was entirely successful; and Florence became mistress of that city. Less decisive, but successful, skirmishes with the Pisans and Sienese also contributed to increase the prestige of the still rising commonwealth. Besides all this, the Florentines found time and forces to spare for the assistance of distant allies. They sent in the year 1255 a troop of five hundred horsemen to Orvieto, to assist that city in its war with Viterbo. But the circumstance is chiefly worth mentioning because it led to an incident which furnishes a remarkable illustration of that fairness and moderation, which has been attributed above to the popular Florentine government at this period, and which very rarely characterised its conduct at any future time.

The troop of five hundred cavaliers sent to Orvieto on this service, passing by Arezzo on their way, were requested by the citizens to aid them in a revolution, the object of which was to drive the Arezzo Ghibellines out of the city. The Florentine commander, thinking probably

\* The district, then and still so called, is the fertile valley of the Sieve in that upper portion of its course which runs in a direction from west to east, that is, from the junction of the Stura with the Sieve, to the junction of the Dicomano with the same river. This beautiful valley then lies immediately behind, and to the north of Monte Senario, and is hidden from Florence by the range of mountains of which that is one of the culminating points.

A.D.  
1256.

that he was sure of the approval of the Guelph authorities of his own city, consented ; and the Ghibellines of Arezzo were driven from their homes. But the Florentine government lost no time in repudiating the act of their general, declaring that having no cause of war with Arezzo, it was not for them to make themselves parties in the civil discords of the Aretines. And they forthwith sent a force to undo the wrong which had been done, and replace the exiled Ghibellines in their homes ;\* an unique instance, probably, in the long course of the Guelph and Ghibelline wars throughout Italy, of the exiles of either party having been restored to their position in their city by the forces of their political adversaries.

In the following year the city was engaged in a graver and more arduous contest. Pisa, at the instigation of Manfred, the natural son of the Emperor Frederick, as Villani declares,† broke the peace by attacking Lucca. Conrad, recognised by the Ghibellines as emperor, had succeeded to his father Frederick ; but dying in 1254, was succeeded in the kingdom of Naples, or Cicilia, as the contemporary historians term it, by his half-brother Manfred. “The said Manfred,” writes Villani,‡ “was the son of a beautiful lady of the Lancia family of Lombardy, who had been loved by Frederick. He was very handsome, like his father, and even more so than he. He was abandoned to pleasure of every sort. A musician and a singer, he was ;§ and willingly saw around him minstrels, and courtiers, and pretty women. He always dressed himself in green cloth. He was very liberal and generous, *di*

\* Coppo Stefani, book ii. rubr. ex. ; Villani, book vi. chap. lxi.

† Book vi. chap. lxii.

‡ Book vi. chap. xlvi.

§ The collócation of the words in the original expresses the old Florentine writer's contempt for those accomplishments in a manner that the English scarcely does justice to.

*buon aire (débonnaire)*; so that he was gracious and much loved. But all his life was epicurean, caring scarcely at all for God or the saints,\* and for nothing save the pleasures of the body. He was an enemy of Holy Church, and of churchmen, taking possession of church property like his father. He was a very rich sovereign too, both by reason of the treasure left by his father Frederick, and his brother Conrad, and from the extent and fertility of his kingdom; which he, despite the continual war he was engaged in with the Pope, maintained as long as he lived in a prosperous condition; so that he rose much in riches and in power both by land and sea.”

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1256.

But the impiety and pleasure-loving habits of the handsome minstrel king would not have provoked the censure of the old Florentine historian, in all probability, if Manfred had not persevered in the traditional policy of his family, by interfering in Tuscan politics, and fomenting discord between city and city, and party and party, in the hope of securing Ghibelline ascendancy, and as a consequence of that, the extension of his own influence and power. And it is worth notice, that the avowed, and as it were natural, connection of Manfred with the Ghibelline party is a curious proof how very little the theoretical rights of the Emperor, and the principle of feudal allegiance to him, had to do with the policy and spirit of Ghibellinism at this period of its development. For Manfred, however much he may have been by virtue of his own energy and prowess rather than by right of any other title, king of Naples, was certainly not emperor. He could in no wise claim any allegiance from Tuscan nobles, or authority over Tuscan cities. But he was the representative of Toryism in Italy; and, as such, the natural ally and protector of the Ghibelline party everywhere.

\* That is to say, he was at war with the Church, which laid claim to the suzerainty of Naples, and was excommunicated.



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1256.

It was as such that he now, having just (1256) been successful in making good his hold of Naples against the Pope, instigated Pisa, Ghibelline in its sympathies as ever, to break the peace with Florence. The Pisans did so, by taking a step that aimed a blow at Florence in a very tender part.

Lucca, from its position, and from its inferiority in strength to either of the two rival cities, was sure sooner or later to fall into the hands of one or the other of them. Both of them watched it with the same sort of anxiety that certain modern potentates feel with regard to the sundry constituent parts of the Turkish empire. Both were always ready to protect it against the other. And now Pisa made an inroad on the Lucchese territory. And they must have perfectly well known that this was equivalent to a formal challenge to Florence.

The attack of Pisa was directed against an important fortress defending a bridge over the river Serchio between Lucca and Pisa; and thither the Florentine forces hastened. The Pisan army appears to have been caught between the Lucchese forces and those of Florence, and a very severe defeat was the result. A vast number of Pisans were left dead on the field; very many were drowned in the Serchio, and no less than three thousand were taken prisoners.\* The victorious Florentines advanced to within a few miles of Pisa, and there celebrated their victory by one of those whimsical boy-like pieces of braggadocio that so often remarkably impress the character of youthfulness on the sentiments and doings of those ages. At the furthest point of their advance on the Pisan territory, they cut down a huge pine; and on the stump of it struck a number of golden florins, distinguished from the usual Florentine coinage by having a little trefoil between the feet of the

\* Villani, book vi. chap. lxii.

figure of St. John, which is borne on the obverse of the florin. "And of these florins," says Villani, "plenty are to be seen to this day." A.D.  
1256.

The first gold coin had been struck in Florence four years before this, in September of the year 1252. The coins were florins of gold of twenty-four carats, or in other words of pure gold without any alloy at all; and eight of them weighed an ounce. On one side they bore the "*Giglio*,"\* which from time immemorial was the cognisance of the Commune, and on the other the figure of St. John. Pisa, wealthy as she was, and had long been, had never possessed any gold coinage of her own; and the achievement was regarded with much pride and triumph by Florence. This circumstance also, perhaps, added a flavour to the taunt embodied and recorded by the coinage of Florentine money on the territory of the rival city.

Pisa was obliged by this defeat to sue for peace, which was granted on the usual terms, consisting chiefly of promises of good behaviour for the future, which however secured by multiplied swearing and by the giving of hostages, were rarely found of any avail to prevent a renewal of hostilities on the first favourable occasion. But an anecdote has been preserved in connection with the negotiations that followed on this Pisan defeat, which is too characteristic of the times to be omitted.

Among the other conditions imposed on Pisa by the victors, was the delivery to Florence of an important stronghold held by Pisa on the Lucchese frontier called the castle of Mutrone, to be held by Florence or to be destroyed at her pleasure; and a council of those elders of the people chosen, as will be remembered, by the people themselves, in accordance with the constitution so strangely improvised by the assembled populace, on that memorable

\* This well-known emblem is not properly a lily, but a species of iris.

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1256.

20th of October, 1250, was held in Florence to decide whether Mutrone should be kept or destroyed. The elders determined that it should be destroyed; but the public announcement of their decision was not to be made till the morrow. The Pisans, meanwhile, were awaiting the determination of Florence on this point with great anxiety. They were extremely desirous that the castle should be destroyed, being of opinion, rightly enough, it would seem, that such an advanced post in the hands of either a Lucchese or Florentine garrison would be a sad thorn in their side. So in the course of that night which intervened between the deliberation of the Florentine elders, and the public announcement of their decision, a Pisan envoy arrived secretly in Florence, bringing with him a very large sum of money. Now there was a certain member of that council, an independent man of the people,\* by name Aldobrandino Ottobuoni, who was known to be the leading man, and to have almost a decisive voice in the council. The Pisan envoy did not venture to enter into direct communication with him; but in the course of that night a friend of Aldobrandino's came secretly to his house, and whispered that he might have four thousand golden florins paid on the nail, or a larger sum if that was not enough, if he would cause Florence to decide on destroying castle Mutrone. The council, as has been seen, had already come to that determination, so that the Florentine elder might at all events without any difficulty, and, as many men would have felt, without greatly burthening his conscience, have accepted the money, and even made no secret afterwards among his own countrymen about such spoiling of the Egyptians. But old Ottobuoni did not see the matter in that light. This extreme anxiety of the Pisans to secure the demolition of the castle set him

\* *Franco popolano* is Villani's phrase.



thinking whether he and his fellow-elders had not been mistaken in their judgment. He meditated the matter during the remainder of that night, and in the morning, before the promulgation of the decision, called together the council, and induced them to reverse their determination.

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1256.

So the Pisans overreached themselves, and castle Mutrone was preserved; and when, shortly afterwards, the patriot elder died, he was buried at the expense of the city, in the church of Santa Reparata, beneath a marble tomb, "higher than any other," as Villani says, with the following verses (incomprehensible both as to sense and prosody, as he gives them, though perhaps none the less complimentary) inscribed on it.

"Fons est supremus Aldobrandinus amœnus  
Ottoboni natus, a bona civita datus."

The Ghibellines, when next the city fell into their hands, destroyed the tomb and the inscription; and might almost have been pardoned for doing so, if they had limited their spite to the abolition of that wonderful epigraph. But they tore the body of the patriot from the grave, and dragging it through the streets, flung it out into the city ditch; \*—a brutal ferocity of stupid partisan spite, which may serve to give the measure of the intensity of the party hatreds of that day.

Since the insurrection of the people against the Ghibellines in 1250, all had been going well with Florence. The Guelphs had been restored without the usual result of driving out the opposite party; the government of the city had been carried on in a moderate spirit; the Florentine arms had been victorious on all sides, the increase of wealth had led to the highly-prized magnificence of possessing a golden coinage; the increase of population

\* Villani, book vi. chap. lxii.

A.D.  
1258.

and traffic had led to the construction of a fourth bridge over the Arno ;\* and lastly, the Florentine democracy had inflicted a severe and notable defeat on the rival Ghibelline city of Pisa. “And the people of Florence, which ruled the city in those days,” says Villani,† “were very proud, and given to deeds of high emprise, and in many respects they were insolent. But one virtue the rulers had : they were loyal and devoted to the Commonwealth.”

But the feelings with which the Ghibelline nobles, secluded in their fortress palaces and shut out from all participation in the government of the city, looked on all this prosperity and saw their political friends and allies snubbed and put down in every part of Tuscany by these prosperous and audacious burghers, may easily be imagined. The last important reverse inflicted on their party by the defeat of the great Ghibelline stronghold of Pisa, seems to have been the last drop which made the cup of their impatience run over.

In July, 1258, one of the Uberti,—for, as usual, that detested family were once again foremost in conspiring against the Commonwealth,—Giovanni degli Uberti, says Coppo Stefani, went out from Florence to make his way in all secrecy to King Manfred, for the purpose of setting before him the prostrate condition of the Ghibelline party in Tuscany, and telling him that, if supported by aid from him, the Florentine Ghibellines were disposed to try a bold stroke for regaining possession of the city, and putting an end to the present democratic government. Manfred seems to have promised the assistance required. But in the meantime some rumour of the conspiracy reached the ears of the government of Florence. The podestà therefore sent a summons to the heads of the Uberti to appear before him and answer these accusations against them ;

\* The Ponte a Santa Trinità, built in 1252.

† Book vi. chap. lxxv.

but they, making sure of the assistance, which they supposed to be near at hand, threw off the mask, shut themselves up in their fortress, and sent back the officers of the podestà wounded, and flying for their lives. But they had not duly reckoned on the tardiness of mercenary troops, and the swiftness of popular indignation. At this open contempt of all law, and rebellion against the authority of the Commonwealth, the whole city rose in arms in an instant. The tocsin bell, which had been placed on the lion tower, exactly with a view to such an emergency, rang out its summons for the first time; the city companies came out from their wards, under their different banners and ward captains; and it soon became abundantly evident that the city was in a very different mood from what it had been on that last occasion of popular assembly, when the organization, which now for the first time was tried in action, had been established.

A.D.  
1258.

The incorrigible lawlessness of the Ghibelline nobles had moved the indignation of the people to the utmost. Of course the general place of meeting, as the companies came towards the centre from the wards, was that *Piazza del Popolo* on which so much of the subsequent history of Florence has been enacted. There, too, stood the grim and menacing feudal stronghold palace of the Uberti, now as ever the ringleaders in every attempt to destroy civic liberty. Its proud towers had been lopped to a more moderate height, as a warning on the last occasion on which the overbearing pride of its lords had provoked civil discord. But the strong walls still remained, a fortress fitted only to enable their owners to set law and the State at defiance, and to be the nest for hatching never-ceasing conspiracies against the liberty and prosperous civic life of Florence. This hated fortress was at once attacked by the people, and soon forced. Schiattuzzo Uberti and several of the retainers and adherents of the family were



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1258. slain in the fight. Uberto degli Uberti and Mangia degli Infangati were taken prisoners, and under torture confessed all the particulars of the conspiracy. They were forthwith hurried off to the Garden of St. Michael,—that *Orto di San Michele* on which one of the most beautiful structures of Florence now stands—and there beheaded.

Then the fury of the people turned itself against the walls, from within which had come forth so much of evil to Florence; and the homes of the Uberti were levelled with the ground, and a decree made that no building should ever again be raised on that accursed spot. In remarkable obedience to which decree, when nearly half a century later the Palace of the Commonwealth was built by the city, it was determined that the plan of it should be so contrived that, at whatever cost of convenience and symmetry to the structure, no inch of it should rest on the soil on which the Uberti had hatched treason against their country.

Of course in such a state of things Florence was no place for the Ghibellines to remain in. The principal leaders of the faction did not wait to be hooted from the city, but made all haste to leave it. The names of many of the leading families, who had then to submit to the fate which they had so recently inflicted on others, are recorded by the historians,\* who, however, conclude their lists by adding, “and many others of less note.” Many Ghibellines, who did not leave the city in the first instance, were compelled, or found it necessary to their safety, to do so in the following days. Many other of their palaces were razed, and the stones were used to build that part of the city wall which passes over the hill of St. George, from the gate of St. Nicolas to the vicinity of the Roman gate. The city was upon this occasion pretty thoroughly purged

\* Malispini, chap. clx.; Villani, book vi. chap. lxxv.; Coppo Stefani, book ii. rubr. cxiii.; Ammirato, book ii. ad an. 1258.

of its Ghibelline element. But the popular passions had been raised to a dangerous height; and the triumph of the popular cause was stained by one act which is severely reprobated by the most thorough partisan Guelph writers.

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1258.

The Abbot of Vallombrosa, a notorious Ghibelline of the noble family of Beccheria of Pavia, being in Florence—where it would seem that, if he were innocent of political plotting, he had at such a moment little business to be, instead of in the safety of his monastery among the hills—fell into the hands of the populace, was accused of having meddled in the late conspiracy, confessed the fact under torture, and despite his loud appeals to the sacredness of his person, and threats of the vengeance of Rome, was beheaded in the Piazza of St. Apollinare, immediately behind the Bargello. For this act Florence was placed under interdict, and the governing body excommunicated, by Pope Alexander IV. But the ecclesiastical censures seem to have sat lightly on the burghers; for we hear nothing further of any consequences following therefrom. A worse result seems to have been, that many Florentines, passing on their affairs through Lombardy, were maltreated by the people of Pavia and the relatives of the abbot in retaliation for his death.

The Ghibellines were gone; the city was quiet; the new walls on the further side of the Arno were being built; the magnificent Palazzo of the Commune was rising proudly from its foundations. But, as ever, the expulsion of the vanquished party was but the germ of new troubles; and the Florentines well knew that the Ghibellines were not gone far, and that they should soon hear more of them. And it was a history filled with similar experiences that begot in the mind of Machiavelli many of those reflections and theories which have excited the reprobation of more happily circumstanced generations in happier countries.

The Ghibellines betook themselves to Siena, which,

A.D.  
1259. generally Ghibelline in its politics and sympathies, and smarting under the recent defeats it had experienced at the hands of the Florentines, received the exiles with open arms, and immediately began to conceive hopes of making the civil discords of Florence the means of avenging their past misfortunes, and regaining all the many positions which the Florentines had taken from them.

The first step necessary was to obtain assistance from King Manfred, the natural head and protector of Ghibellinism in every part of Italy. A deputation of four cavaliers was accordingly sent, of whom Farinata degli Uberti—a name which has remained celebrated in Florentine history, and who is heard of for the first time on this occasion—was one. They found Manfred, however, in the thick of one of his almost unceasing struggles with the Pope, and so hard pressed that he was unable to do more for them than give them a hundred horsemen. Much disappointed at the smallness of this aid, the Ghibelline envoys were disposed to decline it. But Farinata said, “Nay, let us take the hundred horse. We take with them the King’s standard and the King’s reputation; and we will find the means of so using them, that he shall soon be ready enough to give us a more efficient assistance.”

The four envoys returned to Siena, therefore, with their little band of a hundred horsemen, to the great disappointment of those who were awaiting their coming. The Florentines meantime, having heard all these circumstances, thought it better not to wait to be attacked in their own city, but to carry the inevitable struggle on to the territory of the enemy. So the Florentine host marched to Siena in the month of May, 1259, taking the *Carroccio* with them, and encamped before the city. The Ghibelline exiles and their Sienese friends meanwhile treated their German allies magnificently, and one day, having filled “their stomachs with meat and their heads with wine,” they told them



that they were going to make a sally against the enemy encamped before the walls; that they, the Germans, should lead the way, and the whole Sienese host would follow. The poor mercenaries rode forth from the gate, nothing doubting, and rushed to the attack of the Florentine camp. But instead of being supported by their false friends in the city, the gates were closed behind them; the whole band was massacred by the Florentines; the royal banner was dragged in triumph through the camp, as Farinata had foreseen and intended, and suspended the wrong way upwards in Florence, where this disgrace of the royal arms was witnessed by certain prisoners, and duly reported to Manfred, as the Ghibelline chieftain had intended it should be. A.D.  
1259.

Nevertheless, before sending a new application to Manfred, the Florentine exiles thought it well to provide themselves with the means of making an offer, which might facilitate their dealings with a sovereign short of money. They entered into negotiations, therefore, with the Salimbeni company—great Sienese merchants at that period—and succeeded in borrowing from them twenty thousand florins. With this money in their pockets they again went to Manfred, offering to find the pay for eight hundred horsemen for three months, if he could supply the men; and Manfred sent the troops required on these terms.

Half the three months was consumed in the march from Apulia to Siena; it was wholly out of the power of the Ghibellines to raise more money to pay them for a further period;\* and it became urgent therefore with the Sienese and their friends that means should be devised for bringing on a battle at once. Assistance had been obtained from

\* This is the story as told by the Florentine historians. Malavolti, an historian of Siena, writing in the sixteenth century, declares that these troops were paid by Manfred, and that they had already been more than three months in Siena:

A.D.  
1259.

the Pisans and some other Ghibelline communities in Tuscany, so that their disposable forces amounted to eighteen hundred cavaliers, besides the usual proportion of foot soldiers. With this force they at once marched out to attack Montalcino, a protected ally of the Florentines; but fearing that this might not suffice to draw forth the men of Florence to meet them, they had recourse to a plot, which was devised by Farinata degli Uberti, who seems to have been the leading spirit and directing head of the whole affair. He employed two Franciscan\* friars to proceed to Florence, furnished with letters from apparent malcontents in Siena, making an offer to the government to give up to them one of the gates of Siena, as soon as the Florentine army should appear before it. The friars came and made their proposals with every appearance of mystery and secrecy; and the council of elders was completely taken in. They were anxious to put the army in march instantly, on the faith of the two friars. But in the general assembly which was called to decide on the policy to be adopted, the Guelph nobles who, as Villani says, understood more of war than the citizens, were strongly of opinion that the better plan was to wait. They hesitated to attack the eight hundred German horse, and urged that, if the city would only have patience for six weeks, these formidable enemies would return to the south of Italy;—that they were hired only for three months, that half that time had already elapsed, and that they assuredly would not remain a day beyond the covenanted term without further pay, which the Ghibellines were in no condition to give them. Nothing could be more rational than these observations. But the popular leaders would not listen to any policy save that of immediate action. One of the *Anziani* insulted Aldebrando degli Ademari, accusing him

\* St. Francis died in 1226; only thirty-four years before his disciples were thus employed.

of counselling delay only from cowardice. Messer Cece de' Gherardini then rose to speak, and was about to advocate the obvious wisdom of a short delay, when one of the elders of the people reminded him that any citizen speaking without the permission of the elders was liable to a fine of a hundred lire. "I will speak and pay the fine," said Cece. "You have spoken and incurred the fine; and if you proceed will incur a repetition of it," said the popular leader. "So be it!" said Cece, and again proceeded to speak. "Three hundred lire, if you utter another word!" retorted the overbearing citizen. "I will pay three hundred for the privilege of saving my countrymen from ruin," returned the patriotic Gherardini. But the "Anziani," rising, told him that if he persisted further he should pay not with lire, but with his head.

We have seen, a few pages back, the Florentine people under their best aspect—lovers of law; expert at, and given to, organization; quick at combination; willingly obedient to authority set over them by their own act; and powerfully moved by a strong and generous love for the Commonwealth. In the scene above described we see them at their worst; and it is a worst omen of evil issue to the attempt at popular self-government. We see them impatient, arrogant, incapable of forming a due estimate of opponents, puffed up with vainglory and braggadocio ardour born of ignorance. And these are the faults of all inexperienced popular bodies, and are not more fatal or dangerous symptoms than are the analogous defects in individual youth. But far worse than all this, we see them untouched by any real appreciation or conception of the essence of civil liberty—lovers, not of liberty, but of despotic force. The men who impose silence on a fellow-citizen because he wishes to enunciate views in opposition to the popular opinion of the hour, are very far off from any such stage of social culture as can render popular self-



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1260. government a hopeful experiment;—as far as those who by clamour forcibly prevent an unpopular candidate from speaking on a hustings are from being ready to be entrusted with the suffrage. It is not the last time that we shall have to notice similar despotic tendencies in the Florentine people; which, like the ominous symptoms that sometimes, even in the heyday of youth, betray the germ of mortal disease lurking in the constitution, remind us of the fatal catastrophe towards which our story has to travel.

The people had their will. It was determined to march against the enemy. Florence summoned her allies from all the towns with which she had treaties, obliging them to succour her at need;—and Lucca, Pistoria, Prato, Bologna, Volterra, San Miniato (no longer in the gripe of an Imperial Vicar), Colle, San Gemignano, and others, sent their quotas. Florence herself supplied eight hundred citizen horsemen,\* and more than five hundred foot soldiers; and about the latter end of August, in the year 1260, the host marched out with the *Martinello* ringing, and the standard of the Commune flying from the mast of the red *Carroccio*. The army advanced to a spot in the Sienese territory on the river Arbia, called Montaperti, and was there, as had been arranged, joined by the contingents from Perugia and Orvieto, which brought up the entire force to more than three thousand horsemen, and more than thirty thousand foot.†

And then, on the 4th of September, was fought that great and long-remembered battle, “che fece l’Arbia colorata in rosso.”‡ Dante was born five years after that

\* Each attended by two or more squires; so that the 800 represents a force of at least 2400 men.

† Villani, lib. vi. chap. lxxviii. Coppo Stefani says 35,000 foot, book ii. rubr. cxxiii.

‡ Inferno, cant. x. ver. 86—

“Which coloured the river Arbia red.”

fatal day, but the remembrance of it was evidently still as of a thing of yesterday in his time. There are other stories of treachery besides that false promise of treason which led the Florentines to expect that one of the gates was going to be given up to them ; how Bocca degli Abati, marching with the Florentine host, but Ghibelline in his heart, suddenly, with one sabre-cut, smote off the arm of the Florentine standard-bearer, and then, followed by others equally Ghibelline in their real sympathies, galloped over to the enemy ; for which Dante has inflicted on him an immortality of infamy\* among the traitors to their country. But in truth, the solid strength of the German mercenaries, under their leader Giordano da Anglona, the military prowess of the Ghibelline nobles, and the superior strategy of Farinata, were more than a match for the far less homogeneous forces of the allied Guelphic cities ; and despite the most desperate and unyielding valour, they were defeated utterly. Even the palladium *Carroccio*, with its attendant *Martinello*, remained in the power of the enemy, and it may be doubted whether this disgrace did not touch the popular heart in Florence with greater bitterness than any of the more serious consequences of the great defeat. The guardianship of the *Carroccio* had been specially committed to old Giovanni Tornaquinci, now nearly seventy years of age, a consistent and ardent Guelph, who had been in all the battle-fields of Florence for the last half century, and had suffered exile with his party.† Under him was his son, and three other young men of their house ; all fell around the sacred car, together with a heap of citizens, who made a rampart around it with their bodies when they could no longer protect it otherwise, but all in vain.

It has been said that the incessant battles between city

\* Inferno, cant. xxxii. ver. 79.

† Ammirato, book ii. ad an. 1260.

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1260. and city in Italy during those centuries, from the twelfth to the sixteenth, were for the most part not very fatal to life. But the great defeat of Montaperti was an exception to this rule. The Florentine historians state the number of the slain at more than 2500, and the prisoners taken at 1500. The writers on the other side estimate the deaths at 10,000. But in all probability the former statement is the more accurate, and most likely not far from the truth.\*

The battle was fought on Tuesday, the 4th of September; "and on that day," says Villani, thus finishing his account of it, "was broken and destroyed the old popular government of Florence, which had existed for ten years with so great power and dignity, and had won so many victories."

Few events have ever left a more endurable impression on the memory of a people than this great battle between two cities and parties animated both of them by the most unquenchable hatred. The memory of that day has lasted through six hundred years, more freshly perhaps in Siena than in Florence, both because it was in the former city a pleasant, and in the latter a bitter one; and because in these latter times Siena, as a smaller and more remote city less disturbed by the admixture of foreign elements of population, has to a much greater degree retained its old-world ways, thoughts, and feelings. This has been the case there to so singular a degree, and the circumstances are so curiously illustrative of the extraordinary vitality of the old municipal feelings, that I cannot refrain from recording here one or two anecdotes bearing upon this point, which have fallen within my knowledge.

It was but a few years ago—in 1847—that a worthy and well-esteemed citizen of Siena,—a bookseller and publisher,—in the course of a conversation in which Empoli

\* Malispini, chap. clxxii.; Villani, book vi. chap. lxxviii.; Coppo Stefani, book ii. rubr. exxiii.; Ammirato, *loc. cit.*



was referred to, remarked: "Ay, sirs; it was a bad business, that at Empoli!"—"What was a bad business? Has anything happened there?"—"Farinata, I say, made a fool of himself there!\*" *Era meglio spianarla!*" "It would have been better to have levelled it!" meaning Florence, which was at the time of this conversation, as of old, heaving with the throes of revolution. The Sienese citizen was, in all the simplicity of earnestness, thinking of the battle of Montaperti, as if it had made part of the news of the last week. A.D.  
1260.

It was at that same period, that on the flight of the Grand Duke from Florence, when a general movement of fraternisation among the people of the different cities was taking place, and many large bodies of the people had gone up to Florence from several of the towns of Tuscany, a well-known Italian poet and patriot was speaking to a numerous assembly of the labouring classes at Siena, with a view of inducing them to march in a body, as those of other cities had done, to the capital. But though eager supporters of the political movement then in progress, there appeared among them a great reluctance to take this step;—to the surprise of the speaker, who could not at all comprehend the unexplained feeling which was evidently at work among them. At last, on pressing the leaders among them for an explanation of their feelings on the subject, they admitted that they feared lest the remembrance of Montaperti might lead to a quite other than fraternal reception of a body of Sienese by the Florentines. To the much-astonished politician's assurances, that no such result was likely, it was replied, that had he been a Sienese or a Florentine, instead of a Venetian (as he happened to be), he would have felt and spoken differently. And at length he persuaded them to overcome their fears only on condition that he should by regular notarial act

\* The facts alluded to will be found related a few pages further on.

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1260. become a Siennese citizen, and accompany them to Florence, bearing, as they did, a ribbon with the black and white colours of Siena on his arm. All which was done accordingly; and the Siennese inheritors of the glory and the responsibilities of Montaperti marched to Florence with no little misgiving as to the results, and were not a little surprised and touched by the friendly reception which awaited them.

The municipality and the gentry of Siena showed on the same occasion, in a different way, that the memory of Montaperti and the sentiments it had left behind it were not extinct among them either. There are to this day in the Cathedral of Siena, where every visitor to the old Ghibelline city must have observed them, two masts with the Florentine standards which were on that day taken from the *Carroccio* of the rival city. Various trophies of a similar kind, jealously preserved by other cities in memory of the prowess of their mediæval ancestors, had been sent back to the cities from which they had been taken, in token of the cessation of the old Italian municipal jealousies and feuds. It was proposed, therefore, that these famous masts, with their faded colours, should be sent in token of fraternal feeling to Florence. And the people, moved by the reception they had met with, wished that it should be done. But the authorities of the city could not bring themselves to part with them. There they are still, in the beautiful Siena Duomo: Siena is proud of Montaperti yet.

No event had yet happened to Florence which produced any such dismay and sorrow in her streets, as did the defeat of Montaperti. There was not a house in the city, say the chroniclers, however grand, or however humble, from which at least one combatant had not gone forth among that ill-starred host. And grievous was the wail of women in the half-deserted streets, when the first

fugitives from the field brought the fatal tidings. They came with hanging heads, ashamed to return; and those who had remained in the city, the old, the infirm, the sick, wished that they had had the chance of dying on the field, rather than living to see that day in Florence. The sentiment of national disaster and disgrace in that small community,—in which every individual was a far larger portion of the body social than is the case in larger societies, and felt with proportionable intensity the national triumphs and misfortunes,—was perhaps greater than the distress occasioned by the loss of individuals in an age when life was held cheap in accurate proportion to the risks and dangers amid which it was passed. But that was the feeling of the rougher sex, on whose shoulders the weight of the disgrace fell, and the necessity of facing the morrow mainly lay. Mothers, wives, and loving maidens, each in her desolated home, wailed over the individual loss that had made *her* life empty from that bitter day forth.

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Yet tremendous as was the blow, and violent as were the immediate effects of it on Florence and on the Guelph party throughout Italy, it will be seen in the following book, that not even the great battle of Montaperti was an exception to the remark that has been made on the singular degree in which all the contests and all the party triumphs and reverses of that age are characterised by absence of finality in their results. No party is ever rendered safe by its successes; none is ever crushed by its reverses. The greatness of the Montaperti defeat, and the utter prostration of the popular party and the Guelphs which succeeded it, would lead a reader unaccustomed to the indestructible vitality of Italian mediæval communities and parties to conclude that the prospects of Guelphism, as a party in the State, were at least in Florence at an end; and that Florentine democracy was effectually curbed for many a generation to come.



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But let him not trust to appearances in this matter;— and specially not to appearances interpreted by rules and theories drawn from the experience of essentially different social systems. Let him have patience, turn the leaf of a new book, and he shall see a sudden shifting of the slide in the phantasmagoric lantern, showing altogether unexpected metamorphoses and combinations.

## BOOK II.

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FROM THE BATTLE OF MONTAPERTI, A.D. 1260,

TO

THE BEGINNING OF WAR WITH CASTRUCCIO CASTRACANE,  
A.D. 1320.

60 YEARS.





## CHAPTER I.

Consequences of the battle of Montaperti—The Guelphs in exile—At Lucca—“Lo Spedito”—Giordane da Anglona—Conte Guido Novello—Meeting of the Ghibellines at Empoli—Farinata degli Uberti saves Florence—The Guelphs driven from Lucca—Their march to Bologna—Their fortune there—At Modena—At Reggio—Clement IV. invites Charles of Anjou into Italy—His character—Contrasted with Manfred—Guelph cavaliers presented to Charles of Anjou—Battle of Benevento—Death of Manfred—Ghibelline dismay in Florence—The *Frati Gaudenti*—The “Arti”—*Arti Maggiori*—Peculiarity of the new constitution—*Popolani grassi*—*Popolo minuto*—Guido Novello quits Florence—The city in the hands of the people—Guelphs intrigue with Charles of Anjou—Ghibellines leave the city—Charles made master of Florence—Captains of the Guelph party—Expeditions against the Ghibelline exiles—Gregory X. in Florence—Pacification of parties by him—How the Guelphs observed it—Gregory X. passes through Florence when under interdict—Interdict little regarded at Florence—Expeditions against Ghibelline exiles—Nicholas V. sends a legate to Florence—Frà Latino Frangipane—Pacification by him—Decay of the Ghibelline party—Imperial Vicars in Tuscany—Disobedience to their commands—Change in the constitution of Florence—“Priori”—“Arti Maggiori”—“Arti Minori”—“Gonfaloniere”—Nobles allowed to be matriculated to the guilds—Festivities at Florence.

THE immediate consequences that followed from the great Guelph disaster were decisive and notable enough. The victorious army assembled in Siena on the morrow of the battle, determined to march on Florence as soon as the division of the spoil—a work of several days—should be accomplished. It was a matter of course that they should do so, the grand object of the fight having been the restitution of the Ghibellines to their homes, and of Ghibelline government in Florence. The miserable remnant of the Guelphs accordingly were in no wise surprised,

A.D. 1260. when it was known in Florence that the Ghibellines and their allies were on the march towards the city.

One course only was opened to the conquered : expatriation and flight. And on the 13th of September, nine days after the fatal fight, the Guelphs left the city. The simple fact is easily stated in these few words, briefly as it is written down by the contemporary chroniclers after their unimpassioned fashion ; but it needs some exercise of the imagination to picture adequately to oneself all that is involved in that dry statement. This exodus of the Guelphs was a very different one from that other twelve years before. On that occasion few left the city save the leaders of the party, the fighting-men, nobles mostly, who had embraced the popular cause. The body of the people, though understanding well that that was *their* side, though hating the Ghibelline nobles, and calling themselves Guelphs, had hardly begun to take a sufficiently prominent part in the strife of parties, to be involved individually in the disaster of the party chiefs. But the government had now been for ten years in the hands of the people. Many simple citizens had served the office of "Anziano," or Elder, which placed the holder of it among the statesmen of his country, and put power in his hands, the extent of which we have just witnessed in the deplorable scene between the Guelph nobles and the Elders, in the debate which led to the battle of Montaperti. Mercantile wealth had been rapidly increasing ; and a considerable class had already become those "*popolani grassi*,"\* or well-to-do citizens, whose distinction from the men of noble race on the one hand, and from the "*popolo minuto*," or small folks of the populace, on the other, was becoming every year more marked, and will shortly be seen to exercise a very important influence on the fortunes of the

\* Literally, "fat men of the people."

Commonwealth. This well-to-do *bourgeoisie* was composed of men who were the political, if not the social, equals and associates of the Guelph nobles, and who were of quite sufficient note in the city to be personally involved in its misfortunes. But the connection of such men with the class immediately below them in the social scale, was much closer and more indissoluble than that which bound any part of the nobles to their fellow-citizens. The latter were independent men living upon means drawn from their properties outside the walls. The former class were traders, employers of labour, men whose prosperity made the livelihood of many others. And the closing of their shops and manufactories was a much more wide-spreading calamity than the abandonment of a noble's palace.

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1260.

For these reasons the exodus of 1260 was a very much more numerous one than that of 1248 had been ; and it included in it vast numbers of a class much less able to meet and override the calamity. Largeness of number alone grievously increases the evil of such a time of trouble. Alleviations which may be available for tens, or even hundreds, are not attainable for thousands. And the "Omne solum forti patria est," with which the warlike noble may have consoled himself, imparted but cold comfort to an artisan driven forth from his home and his industry ; and still colder to the helpless wife with her little ones, compelled to plod the weary miles of the path of exile after him.

Another circumstance which rendered this exodus of the Guelphs a worse calamity than the former one, was that now nearly all Tuscany was shut against them. So thorough had been the defeat, so complete the Ghibelline ascendancy resulting from it, that in every city the same scene on a lesser scale was taking place. Many of the smaller towns, which had always been Guelph in their sympathies, were now subjected to Ghibelline despotism.



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1260. One refuge alone remained in Tuscany—Lucca. Either because the Ghibelline element within the walls was weaker there, as is probable, from the constant enmity between that city and neighbouring Pisa, always so strongly Ghibelline, or because the dominant Ghibellines had for the present too much on their hands to turn their attention as yet to the more distant and less promising enterprise of Ghibellinising Lucca, that city was still open as a refuge to the exiles. And thither the whole body of the expatriated Guelphs betook themselves.

Such bread and shelter as was possible was found for the throng of refugees; for they were Guelphs in trouble, and Lucca was a Guelph city. But the material as well as moral misery was great among the helpless crowds idly thronging the streets of Lucca in reckless exile fashion. And there were strange meetings and bitter reminiscences among those idlers as they asked each other the news from Florence, and were told of the destruction of homes, and the confiscation of property, and of the absence of any gleam of hope for the future in any quarter of the political sky.

So met one day in the Lucca streets, as the chroniclers have recorded,\* the brave cavalier, Aldobrando Adimari, whose counsel should have saved the city, if the city would have listened to him, and that Elder of the People, who so grossly insulted him on the occasion of the debate which sent Florence to its fate at Montaperti, "*Lo Spedito*,"—the Go-ahead,—they call him, by his nickname, and have not immortalised his folly by any other title. The old noble could not refrain from reminding him of the overbearing violence which had resulted in bringing ruin upon all of them: to which the other replied in the bitterness of his heart, that the Florentines deserved no better for listening to such as himself.

\* Ammirato, book ii. ad an. 1260.

The Ghibellines entered Florence in triumph on the 16th of September, three days after their enemies had left it. But the triumph must have been but a melancholy one even to them. The city seemed like a desert. The gates were standing open and unguarded; the streets were empty; the comparatively few inhabitants who remained, almost entirely of the lowest class of the populace, were shut up in their obscure dwellings, or were on their knees in the churches. And what was worse, the conquerors did not come back alone. They had invited a foreign despot to “restore order,” and “save society” in their native city; and despots have but one notion of the safety of society. So Giordano da Anglona, King Manfred’s general, marched with them from Siena to Florence, he and his eight hundred German horsemen and their squires. I find no further mention of any difficulty about their pay; nor any of that hurry to get back to their master, as soon as their three months’ service should be over. The noble knight, Giordano da Anglona, on the contrary, was good enough to complete the service he had rendered to Florence by establishing himself as Manfred’s vicar within its walls. All the constitutional authorities established by the people, and the whole framework of the former government, were destroyed, and the city was ruled entirely by direction transmitted from the king’s Sicilian court.\* Truly the way in which such matters were managed seems to have been subject to very few improvements in the course of six hundred years.

Giordano da Anglona, however, was too useful a man to his master to be left in Florence longer than was necessary to sweep away all traces of the old popular liberty, and to set things going on the orthodox legitimate track; but before quitting Florence he named Conte Guido Novello, a Ghibelline of the Ghibellines, as Manfred’s vicar in

\* Coppo Stefani, book ii. rubr. cxxv. ; Ammirato, book ii. ad an. 1260.

A.D.  
1261.

Tuscany. His rule was to commence with the new year 1261 ; but the Ghibellines were not idle during the month that yet remained of the memorable year 1260. Of course their first care was to destroy the homes of the Guelph leaders, confiscate their property, and divide it among themselves ; but it is easier and quicker to destroy than to rebuild. The Ghibellines, on re-entering the city, found their own palaces in ruins, and many of them, as that of the Uberti, utterly levelled with the ground. Florence, therefore, was of little value in their eyes ; and when towards the close of the year, before Giordano left Tuscany, a general meeting of all the Ghibelline party was held at Empoli, at which ambassadors from the Ghibelline cities, especially from Siena and Pisa, attended, they actually proposed the total destruction of Florence, as the sole means of once for all securing the permanent ascendancy of their party throughout Tuscany. It may easily be understood that the deputies from Siena and Pisa, and the Ghibellines of other cities, were at once struck by the wisdom and prudence of this policy, and backed it with all their influence and eloquence. The royal vicar had of course nothing to say against the demolition of a city which, from its earliest days, had been a thorn in the side of all legitimate potentates, and the very nest and head-quarters of democracy and popular insolence. And the utter destruction of Florence would on that day have been decreed, had there not been in that Ghibelline assembly one man who was a Florentine before he was a Ghibelline. One only voice was raised against the atrocious proposition ; but it was such a voice and so raised that it prevailed. Yet the one sole individual in all that assembly to whom Italy and the world owe the preservation of Florence—the gem and the eye of Italy—was the head of that family which, more than any other, was hated by the Guelph and popular party, and which had suffered from that hatred more than any other.



The Uberti palaces were no more existing in Florence ; A.D.  
1261.  
the ground whereon they had stood was accursed ; the heads of the race had been slain while defending the walls ; and two of those proud nobles had been put to death by the public executioner in the public streets of Florence. Yet Farinata degli Uberti it was who had sufficient nobility of soul to scorn so senseless and brutal a measure of indiscriminate vengeance. When all had received the proposal with applause, he rose and addressed the meeting in a speech of burning indignation and reproof ; and declaring finally that, let them decide as they would, no such doom should be executed on Florence as long as he could wield a sword in her defence, he left the assembly.

But all there felt that the party could not afford to lose Farinata degli Uberti—the chief whose prudence and valour had mainly contributed to place them in the position they now occupied. So the Vandal project was at once abandoned ; the great Ghibelline was humbly entreated to return to his place at the council board, and nothing more was heard of destroying Florence.\*

Dante unhappily, instead of placing Farinata in Paradise for this noble deed, so superior to the ordinary level of the sentiments of his age and the passions of those around him, finds him in hell, by reason of some unorthodox opinions of his respecting the immortality of the soul. But the passage in which the Ghibelline patriot refers to his conduct towards his country, is an especially beautiful one. “*Dimmi,*” tell me, he asks sadly of the visitor from the upper world :—

“Dimmi, perchè quel popolo è sì empio  
Incontra a miei in ciascuna sua legge ?†

\* Villani, book vi. chap. lxxxi. ; Coppo Stefani, book ii. rubr. cxxvi. ; Ammirato, lib. ii. ad an. 1260.

† “Tell me, why that people (of Florence) is so cruel against those of my race, in all its laws ?” On which I said to him, “The rout and the great

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Ond' io a lui : lo strazio e 'l grande schempio  
 Che fece l' Arbia colorata in rosso,  
 Tale oraizon fa far nel nostro tempio.  
 Poi ch' ebbe sospirando il capo scosso ;  
 A ciò non fù io sol, disse, ni certo  
 Senza cagion sarei con gli altri mosso ;  
 Ma fu' io sol colà, dove sofferto  
 Fu per ciascun di torre via Fiorenza  
 Colui che la difesi a viso aperto."

Count Guido Novello, the new lieutenant of King Manfred, was not content as long as the Guelphs had any resting-place left them in Tuscany, and marched out to Lucca against them. Decimated, dispirited, and ill-prepared as they were, they were not reduced so low as to wait to be crushed without striking a blow. They hastily threw themselves into Signa, a spot where the Arno and the road to the lower Valdarno, which accompanies it, enter a defile of the hills, and which therefore is a strong position for a force wishing to bar the way from Florence towards Pisa and Lucca, and attempted to defend the pass ; but the inequality in force was too great, and they were easily routed.

The Ghibelline army marched on Lucca, and had not much more difficulty in reducing that city. The government was put into Ghibelline hands, and Lucca became a Ghibelline city like all the rest of Tuscany. The Lucchese were not required by the victors to turn their own Guelphs out of the city. But it was imperatively insisted on that every Guelph not a native citizen should be thrust forth from the gates. The fresh aggravation of their position thus inflicted on the miserable exiles from Florence may

disaster which coloured Arbia red causes such speeches to be made in our halls of assembly." Then, after shaking his head with a sigh, he said, "I am not alone concerned in those deeds ; nor assuredly should I have joined others to do them, without cause. But I *was* alone there, where the annihilation of Florence was accepted by every one,—the only one who defended her openly."—Infer. Can. 10.

be easily imagined. Literally there was now no rest for the soles of their feet on Tuscan soil. And the wretched band were compelled, at three days' notice, to go forth from the gate, and turn their faces towards the rugged and roadless mountain barrier which separated them from Bologna, the nearest refuge. Old and young, women and children, had to make that terrible journey across the Apennines; and many of the Guelph ladies, says Villani,\* amid the fatigues and hardships of the way, gave birth to children on the mountains.

A.D.  
1261.

It was in very miserable guise that the wanderers reached Bologna; and most of them were absolutely dependent upon charity for bread. But they had not long been in that city before an opportunity offered itself of improving their condition in some degree. A struggle chanced to be going on between Guelph and Ghibelline parties at Modena; and the former party bethought them of inviting the newly-arrived body of exiles to come over from Bologna, which is but twenty miles from Modena, and help them. The chance was felt to be a godsend by the poor Florentines. They hurried to the scene of action; and fighting like men who have little to live for, and who may improve, but cannot make worse, their condition, utterly defeated the Ghibelline force, and put Modena into the hands of the citizens of their own party.† A similar occasion very shortly afterwards occurred in Reggio, another city a little further north. There again the assistance of the Florentine Guelphs turned the fortunes of the contest in favour of their own party. The struggle was a far severer one than it had been in Modena; for the Ghibellines were much more powerful at Reggio. But the spoil obtained from their defeat was proportionably large; and besides sufficing for some of the most urgent needs of the poor exiles,

\* Book ii. chap. lxxxv.

† Villani, book ii. chap. lxxxvi.; Ammirato, book ii. ad an. 1263.



A.D. 1265. enabled them to equip, completely in all respects, a select body of four hundred horsemen from among their own ranks, which little force took, as will shortly be seen, an influential part in the events which were on the eve of once again changing the face of things in Tuscany.

For already in 1265, five years only after what seemed the utter destruction of the Guelphs and Guelphism, there were signs in the political sky of one of the sudden storms which so often in those centuries reversed the position of all the parties on the political stage.

Clement IV., a Frenchman, succeeded to Urban IV. in 1265; and burning with indignation at the success with which the much anathematized Manfred had resisted his predecessors, determined on adopting new and more powerful means for his destruction. The Holy See claimed suzerain rights over the kingdom of Naples. If it found difficulty in causing those rights to be respected, the best plan was to use them to the profit of some one who could make them available. For this purpose the Pope determined on bestowing the crown of Naples on Charles of Anjou, the brother of the French king St. Louis, and inviting him to come and take possession of it. It is impossible to imagine a greater contrast between any two men than that which existed between Manfred and the opponent pitted against him by the Church. The handsome, highly-cultivated, accomplished, humane, pleasure-loving, amiable, and much-loved minstrel and poet king has been already described. Here is what Villani says\* of Charles of Anjou:—"This Charles was wise and prudent, and valiant in arms. He was harsh and much feared, and redoubted by all the kings in the world. Magnanimous† he was, and of high emprise, and sure in

\* Book vii. chap. i.

† "Magnanimo" must not be understood to mean, in the mouth of the old historian, quite what "magnanimous" means among ourselves. "High-spirited," perhaps comes nearer the mark.

the execution of great undertakings. He was ever firm in adversity, a truthful keeper of his promises, a sparing speaker, and a busy actor. He scarcely ever laughed, was as strict in his conduct as a monk, an orthodox Catholic, severe in the administration of justice, and ferocious in expression of face. In person he was tall and strong, of olive complexion, with a long nose. And he had in truth more of royal bearing about him than another man. He watched late, and slept little, being wont to say that sleep was loss of time. He was liberal to his men-at-arms, but was covetous to gain lands and seignories, and money for the prosecution of war. Courtiers, poets, and minstrels he could never endure.”

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1265.

Such was the hard, cruel, ambitious prince, scrupulous in orthodox hatred of all that humanises and refines the life of man, most unscrupulous in all that could minister to his master passion, the greed of dominion and the lust of power; whom the Church, true to her policy of furthering her pious ends by utilizing the vices of men, even at the cost of fostering them, called in as her champion against the excommunicated Manfred; and whom the less prudent and less far-seeing Guelphs were willing to accept as the leader and protector of their faction. For the purposes of Holy Church this hard, saturnine, bigot warrior was chosen with all that skill and intimate consciousness of her own requirements which has always marked the selection of her instruments. As for the needs of the liberal party in Italy; it has taken as nearly as possible six hundred years from that time to teach the Italians the value and the meaning, now at last pretty well recognised and duly appreciated, of liberty proffered and patronised by France.

History never repeats itself, we are told. Truly it does not; and if it did, to eat and drink and to-morrow die would be all that was left to us. Yet though the scenery, and the actors and the costume, and, thank God! the

A.D.  
1265. catastrophe of the great drama be changed, how often do the plot and the moral singularly resemble those of the old pieces in the repertory !

So the olive-coloured, long-nosed Frenchman came over the Alps to enact the Eldest Son of the Church and restorer of Italian liberties. The four hundred Guelph cavaliers, armed and mounted, as we have seen, from the Ghibelline spoils at Reggio, sent a dutiful deputation to the Holy Father, offering their swords in the good cause of Mother Church and liberty. They were received by the Pontiff with open arms, and presented with warm recommendations to Charles, just then arrived in response to the Papal invitation in Italy. To mark yet more the Papal sympathy with them, and the identification of the Church with the Guelph party, the Holy Father graciously permitted them to assume his own arms, a red eagle on a white field, with a green dragon in its talons. To this device the Guelphs added a small red *giglio* over the eagle's head ; and so modified, that bearing became the arms of the Guelph party to the end of the chapter. Graciously received by Charles, so far as it was in him to be ever gracious, the little band of Guelphs, under their captain Guido Guerra, belonging to a branch of the great Guidi family, which had separated itself from the rest of the race, and had become Guelphs, were appointed to guide the French troops under Guy de Montfort on their way to join their leader in the neighbourhood of Rome. And there was abundance of fraternizing as usual between the Italians and the Frenchmen ; and the poor Tuscan exiles were much flattered by the Frenchmen's expression of astonishment " that exiles from their country should be so nobly caparisoned."\* And all went well ; and the great battle of Benevento was fought on the 16th of February, 1265 ; in which Manfred, deserted in the crisis of the fight by some of his barons,

\* Villani, book vii. chap. iv.



was utterly routed, and he himself slain.\* His death was not known with certainty till three days after the battle; for it was then only that his corpse was found, amid the dead on the field, and recognised. A.D.  
1265.

Great was the dismay among the Ghibellines in Florence when the news of Manfred's death reached the city. "They stood most vigilantly on their guard; and knew not what to do."† For "the people began to growl, remembering that they once were the masters and the rulers; that they were masters no more, but were treated like dogs by the Ghibellines, with their taxes that Count Guido Novello laid on them."‡ And the banished Guelphs took heart, and began to approach and hover around the city, waiting the return of their select band of four hundred.

From day to day the misgivings of the Ghibellines grew stronger; till, as a means of contenting and quieting the people, whose attitude became more and more menacing, they hit on the strange expedient of inviting from Bologna two knights of a half-military half-religious order, recently established there, and putting the government into their hands. One of these men was by party connection a Ghibelline, and the other a Guelph; and it was intended by this step to make a show of moderation and even-handed impartiality. The people made no resistance; but neither did they receive the two new governors with any enthusiasm. "*Frati Gaudenti*," they were called. Their order very soon ceased to exist; and Villani remarks of them contemptuously, that "their conduct answered to their name;—that is to say, they thought more of enjoying themselves (*Gaudere*), than anything else."

During their government of the city, however, a new political organization of the people was introduced, which

\* Malispini, chap. clxxxvii.; Villani, book vii. chap. ix.; Coppo Stefani, book ii. rubr. cxxxi.; Ammirato, book ii. ad an. 1265.

† Coppo Stefani, book ii. rubr. cxxxii.

‡ *Ibid.*

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1265. played a most important part in all the future history of the Commonwealth. This was the division of the people into "*Arti*," or guilds, not only for the purposes of municipal, but of military organization. The recognised guilds were at this first creation of them seven only,—the lawyers; the dealers in foreign \* cloths; the money changers; the woollen manufacturers; the physicians and apothecaries; the silk manufacturers and mercers; and the furriers. Various other guilds were afterwards added to the list; but these remained as the "*Arti Maggiori*." All these guilds were placed under consuls, had special armorial bearings and ensigns assigned to each of them; beneath which, and led by their consuls, they were to be ready to appear in arms and act as a national guard in any emergency that might require it.

It will be observed at once, that this popular organization is very similar in its scope and methods to that former one of the wards under the Elders, which was destroyed after the great Guelph overthrow at Montaperti. Two important differences however will be noted between the old and the new constitution. The first was a merely local classification of the people according to the parts of the city they inhabited. And it is to be observed, that in Florence from that day to this, no district of the city is inhabited exclusively by any one social class. The second constitution, on the contrary, enrolls the people according to their occupations. The difference is a very important one. For one street, or one ward of the city had no natural pre-eminence over another. But one trade or profession does rank higher in the social scale than another. The first division could give rise to no jealousies, and to but faint

\* In those cloths that came in great quantities to Florence to be dressed and dyed. The woollen manufacturers were a different body. The first were called the "*Arte di Calamala*;" a name still belonging to a street which was the main seat of the trade.

rivalries. The second was eminently calculated to produce both. A.D.  
1265.

The other still more important difference is to be found in the designation given above, of "*Arti Maggiori*," the greater, richer, more dignified, more "respectable" guilds. Here we have the germ of a new aristocracy springing up, from the increasing commercial wealth and prosperity of the Commonwealth. These members of the "*Arti Maggiori*" were "*popolani*," men of the people; but they were "*popolani grassi*," fat citizens, in very marked contradistinction to those of the "*popolo minuto*"—or small folks, whom we shall ere long find treading on the kibes of their fat fellows, as these have already begun to do on those of the nobles.

For Florence was a free Commonwealth; and this is the normal and regular march of the body social in a free state. And it was not this which caused the final overthrow and catastrophe.

It was a very short time only, as might be supposed, that the Ghibelline chieftains, and the people thus organized, could remain together in peace in the city. The immediate ground of quarrel that broke out between the despotic ruler and the would-be free people, was the usual difficulty. The Count had absolute need of money to pay his standing army,—those eight hundred German horsemen sent by Manfred, as we may remember, to keep order and save society. Of course they could not save society without monthly pay; and the citizens demurred at supplying the pay. So there was a "demonstration." Villani declares\* that Count Guido took fright before he had any cause to do so;—and that the people, though armed, had no intention of committing any violence. The Ghibelline chief, however, gathered his men in the Piazza St. Apolli-

\* Book vii. chap. xiv.



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1265.

nari, under the windows of the Bargello (then the palace of the Podestà, and inhabited by the two *Gaudenti* cavaliers, who shared that office between them). And despite the remonstrances of the two *Gaudenti*, who, foreseeing that his giving up the game would be the end of their stewardship, kept screaming to him out of the windows of the palace not to alarm himself,—that they would quiet the people, and warrant his safety, and get him his money; he called to his men to know if they were all there; and being answered in the affirmative, rode out of the town and off to Prato.\* When half way to that city—*i.e.* about six miles from Florence,—he began to think that the *Frati Gaudenti* had been right, and that he had acted very foolishly. So he turned his horse's head, and rode back to Florence; and would have re-entered it. But it was too late. Though the people might not have been prepared to attack him and his eight hundred horsemen in the city, they were far too much alive to the advantage of having them on the outside of the walls to allow them to return. So Count Guido Novello had to turn once more towards Prato; and was, I am inclined to think, by no means pleasant company that evening to any persons whose ill stars threw them in his way.

As before, when the city was in the hands of the people in the absence of the nobles of both parties, the citizens, when they had thus got rid of the Ghibelline count, were inclined to be moderate and conciliatory. They declared that Guelphs and Ghibellines alike were free to return to the city; they strove to bring about reconciliations between them; and in many cases matrimonial alliances were arranged between houses of the rival factions.

But the virus of party hatred had too thoroughly entered into the blood of the leading partisans on either

\* Villani, book vii. chap. xiv.

side for it to be possible for these well-meant efforts to succeed. The Guelph chiefs who had not formed any such alliances, became suspicious of those of their own party who had done so. Concord and common obedience to the law was not what they wanted, but the supremacy of their party. So the leading Guelphs secretly sent a deputation to Charles, begging for assistance against their rivals. Of course the Frenchman could wish nothing better than such an application. Without an hour's delay he despatched eight hundred French horsemen under Guy de Montfort, who arrived in Florence on Easter Sunday in the year 1267.\* The Ghibellines knew what this meant very well. They had had their turn with Guido Novello and his eight hundred German troops; now the Guelphs were to have theirs with Guy de Montfort and his eight hundred French cavaliers. So without waiting for a contest, for which they were manifestly too weak, or for insults under a thin veil of legality and impartiality, they quietly marched out of the city on the eve of the day on which the French entered it.

A.D.  
1267.

In the city matters proceeded in the normal path with a regularity and smoothness really worthy of the decencies of a later age. Filled with gratitude towards their magnanimous ally, the Florentine Guelphs offered to his Majesty the lordship of their city for ten years, sending him the result of the city's universal suffrage† to that effect. The magnanimous ally replied, that he wished to reign only in the hearts and not over the persons of the Florentines. But on the city again beseeching his Majesty to accept their allegiance, and dropping all mention of that limitation to ten years,‡ he not only condescended to accede to their request, but sent his Vicar every year to

\* Villani, book vii. chap. xv.; Ammirato, book ii. ad an. 1267.

† "Elezione libera e piena."—Villani, *loc. cit.*

‡ "La prese semplicemente."—Villani, *ibid.*

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1267.

rule over them with the utmost regularity. So anxious was he, too, to fall in with the humours of his new subjects, that that favourite popular institution of the twelve elders of the people to sit as assessors of the chief political authority was preserved, with the merely inappreciable difference that his Majesty took on himself the trouble of selecting them.\*

At this time also was first created one of the most singular institutions that ever entered avowedly into any scheme of polity, and which very curiously illustrates the theory of a social system prevailing in the Florentine mind at that period. This was the magistracy consisting of three officers, called "Captains of the Guelph party," and often in the historians more shortly, "Captains of the Party."† The title alone suggests a series of pertinent reflections. What a confession it involves! A permanent magistracy created for the behoof and furthering the exclusive interests of one party in the State! A "Lord Chancellor of the Tories!" or "Board of Commissioners of the Whigs!" Avowedly, then, Florence was to be governed for the benefit of one section of the citizens alone. And see what were the duties and functions of the "Captains of *the* Party." In the first place, and in the first instance, they were to take the management of all the confiscated Ghibelline property, distributing one-third among the Guelphs who had suffered from proscription, paying over one-third to the coffers of the State, and administering the other for the advantage of the Guelph party. They were to keep watchful guard over all the interests of the party; and they were to make special inquisition into the conduct and character of citizens

\* Villani, *loc. cit.*

† The first title was "Consuls of the Cavaliers." But this appellation had no significance of the functions of the office, and was soon dropped for the more expressive one, by which the institution is known throughout Florentine history.



suspected of Ghibelline tendencies, noting them as not eligible to any office or employment in the government ; banishing such if need were, and in case of confiscation taking possession of their goods in trust for the above uses.\* And this extraordinary magistracy answered so well to the wants and notions of the Florentine mind, corresponded so perfectly in its theory and practice to their conceptions of the object of government, that it continued to exist, among so much else that perished, throughout the entire duration of the Commonwealth, and gradually was invested with much wider functions and more extended action than was contemplated at its first establishment.

A.D.  
1273.

Does the reader begin to understand why this people, however favourable their early start on the path of free institutions and self-government, came to early failure and fatal overthrow ?

The Ghibellines being in exile, and the Guelphs having the eight hundred horsemen of King Charles at their command, the few following years were occupied with sundry victorious expeditions against the cities, smaller towns, and castles which harboured Ghibellines, or belonged to them. But in 1273 Pope Gregory X., who had succeeded Clement IV. in the previous year, being on his way from Rome, in company with King Charles and with Baldwin of Flanders, who called himself Emperor of Constantinople, to hold a council at Lyons, arrived in Florence on the 18th of June. “And as the sojourn of Florence pleased them, by the goodness of the water and the salubrity of the air, and because the Court found every comfort in the city, it was determined to spend the summer there ; and the Pope, observing that so fine a city as Florence was wasted by reason of the parties (for the Ghibellines were in exile), willed that they should return,

\* Ammirato, book iii. ad an. 1267.

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1273.

and make peace with the Guelphs; and so it was done. And on the 2nd of July in that year, the said Pope with his cardinals, and with King Charles, and with the Emperor Baldwin, and with all the barons and courtiers, and the Florentine people, were all collected together in the dry bed of the Arno at the foot of the Ponte Rubaconte;\* and huge scaffoldings of wood, on which all the great people were placed, having been erected in that place, the Pope gave sentence in the matter between the Guelphs and the Ghibellines under pain of excommunication to whomsoever should not obey it; and he made the syndics of either party kiss each other on the mouth, and make peace, and give bail and hostages. And all the castles held by the Ghibellines were to be given up into the hands of King Charles.”†

If any painter be in want of a subject I recommend to his notice the scene thus naïvely described by the old chronicler. Those who have ever stood on that bridge—for it is not likely that they should have got down to the wide, dry, gravelly bed of the stream, where the above goodly company were assembled, fenced in, as it now is, by the high walls of quays on either side,—those who have stood on the bridge above it, will not have forgotten the lovely landscape-framing of the scene; the cypress-crowned hill of St. Miniato, the richer green of the valley through which the river makes its way amid fields teeming with corn, and wine, and oil; and the distant horizon of many-shadowed Chianti and Vallombrosa hills as a background, while in front there is the city, and far behind it the distant jagged peaks of the Carrara mountains. Their sate Pope Gregory, a man of noble presence, as I find by the effigies of him, with fine strongly-marked but clean-cut Italian features, in the prime of life apparently, and, unlike the Popes of a later century, with chin

\* Otherwise the Ponte alle Grazie.

† Villani, book vii. chap. xlii.

and lip close shaven ; on one side of him olive-coloured saturnine Charles of Anjou, with his long nose and hard ascetic face ; and on the other, big, bluff, Flemish Baldwin the Crusader, a large-boned, pink-fleshed man in coat of mail, sitting there with little personal interest in the matter in hand, but contributing his part to the pageant, while his thoughts were wandering away mayhap to busier and more exciting scenes under a yet hotter and brighter sun ; and all the gala following of them in iron and silk, knights and squires, bishops and deacons, with the Florentine people lowly on the bare gravel in front, completing the large circle in that strangely chosen spot in the bed of the river, where the heavy piers and arches of the bridge, rising high to the immediate westward of them, were gilded by the rays of the rising July sun. The Ghibelline nobles in their mail, leaning on their long swords, haughty, sullen, and suspiciously distrustful, were grouped together aloof from the citizens, on one side of the circle ; and the principal Guelphs not less haughty, but with the bearing and in the humour of men who are on the winning side, on the other. Most pleased on the occasion were the Florentine populace, to whom the day was a great day indeed. How they talked incessantly each man and woman to their neighbour, marked each smallest trifle in the mien, bearing, and expression of those great ones of the earth, built acute theories of character on their looks, and of intentions on their bearing ! How they pointed out to one another each Ghibelline noble by name, and noted their sullen and mistrustful bearing ! But suddenly there is a great silence. The Vicar of Christ upon earth speaks. But his speech is in Latin ; and even were it not its tones could not reach the ears of that vast multitude. He utters only a few formal words, and then the heralds make proclamation ; and the representatives of the two parties come forward in the midst. And the

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A.D.  
1273.

Ghibellines are told that their castle homes are to be handed over to the magnanimous ally, who has no idea of enacting his part in the show for nothing ;—and then they are to kiss, and be friends with their enemies to the death ; and every human being on the ground there knows that as that kiss is given and received, the parties to it are burning to clutch each other by the throat in a death-struggle. And then Heaven's Vicar speaks again ;—this time more intelligible, though still in Latin ;—for he is menacing curses, anathemas, excommunications, and interdicts, and the words are more familiar to his hearers' ears.

And then the Pope finished his day's work by laying the foundation-stone of a church, dedicated to " St. Gregory " of course, which was to be built by the Mozzi, who were his bankers at Rome and his hosts at Florence, and whose palace was then and is now hard by the spot where the above memorable scene took place.

And peace having been thus solemnly made, and sworn to, with kisses *in esse* and excommunications *in posse* to ratify it, it was four days afterwards whispered in the ear of the Ghibelline syndic, as he returned to his lodging in the city, that if he and his party did not take themselves off out of Florence forthwith, King Charles' marshal would cut them into mincemeat. And the Ghibellines took the hint, and once more left the city.\*

The Pope, however, was as good at his word, as far as the cursing went. He left Florence immediately, pronouncing it under interdict before he went ; in which condition it remained three years, with the exception at least of an interval of an hour or so, which was due to a circumstance characteristic enough of those days.

Gregory was on his way to Lyons, as has been said, when he halted for the summer at Florence. He went to Lyons and held his council there, and was on the way back ; but

\* Villani, book vii. chap. xlii. ; Ammirato, book iii. ad an. 1273.

ecclesiastical etiquette forbade him to put foot in a city which was under interdict, and every one in it excommunicated. So the Pope passed close outside the walls, intending to cross the Arno by a ferry a little above the city. But the river was in flood; the ford was impassable; and the Pope had nothing for it, if he would continue his journey, but to pass through the banned city. So to make all right, he took off the interdict as he entered the gate, and kept giving blessings right and left as he went through the streets, all in the regular way. But no sooner had he reached the opposite gate, and got clear of it, than he turned him about, and taking back all the blessings he had been dispensing, put the interdict on again, muttering Latin texts as he did so, "which put the Guelph rulers of the city in great perplexity and fear."

A.D.  
1273.

It is surprising, when we remember the consequences of Papal interdicts in other climes and other ages,—as specially for instance that of Venice in the seventeenth century,—to observe the very little effect which they seem to have produced on Florence in this thirteenth century. Once or twice already Florence has been excommunicated and laid under interdict; and now again for three years. Yet no trace is to be found of any mischief or trouble having ensued in consequence of the punishment. Simply nothing more is heard about it. The years, indeed, immediately following this angry departure of the Pope, seem to have been altogether prosperous ones. Some expeditions were undertaken against Ghibelline Pisa, and other scattered elements of Ghibellinism, always with the assistance of the French forces maintained in the city by Charles, and with nearly invariable success. The fact was, as Ammirato points out,\* that it did not suit Charles that Florence should be at peace. It was his interest that the citizens should have need of him; and with that view he had

\* Book iii. ad an. 1279.

A.D. 1277. found means of “always keeping the party enmities alive in the city.”\*

It was probably due to evil influence of the same kind, that in the absence of a sufficient amount of quarrelling with the Ghibellines, enmities and rivalries which endangered the prosperity of the city arose at this time between some of the great Guelph families among themselves. There was so much disturbance and danger of violent outbreak from this cause in the city, that the authorities sent to Pope Nicholas III., who had been elected in 1277, entreating him to send a legate to make peace in the city between the rival houses. Notwithstanding the ill success of the similar attempt so recently made by Pope Gregory X., Nicholas III. was willing to try again; because, as Villani and Ammirato explain,† he was angry with Charles for having haughtily refused an alliance between their families, which the Pope, who was an Orsini, had proposed to him, and was sure that healing the Florentine discords would be spiting the Frenchman. So he sent Cardinal Frà Latino Frangipane, a man of high reputation for his acquirements and ability, as his legate to Florence. The Cardinal arrived with a retinue of three hundred horsemen on the 8th of October, 1278, and was received with great honour by the Florentines, who paid him the distinguished and unusual compliment of sending out the Carroccio to meet him. He also, as Pope Gregory had done, laid the first stone of a church, and it was a much more notable one than the Pope’s church,—none other in fact than the fine Basilica of Santa Maria Novella. And it was in that convent that he did all the work of his embassy, calling the parties severally before him there; first reconciling Guelphs with Guelphs, and then proceeding to the more arduous task of making peace between Guelph and Ghibelline. For

\* Ammirato, *loc cit.*

† Villani, book vii. chap. liv.; Ammirato, book iii. ad an. 1279.



the latter, when they had heard that a Cardinal was to be sent to Florence on a peace-making mission, had begged to be included in his good offices. When he had done the real work thus privately in the convent, then, and not before, he too had a great public manifestation. It took place in the Piazza Vecchia di Santa Maria Novella; and there were draperies, and scaffoldings, and speeches, and oaths, and kissing, all over again as before. "And now," says Villani, "the Ghibellines were at liberty to return to Florence, they and their families. And they did return; and all decrees and condemnations against them were cancelled; and all the books of the party proscriptions and banishments that were preserved in the archives of the Commune were burned. And the said Ghibellines had back again their goods and possessions; except that certain of the leading families were ordered, for the safety of the city, to remain for a certain time beyond the boundaries of the Florentine territory." \*

A.D.  
1278.

In fact little more is heard henceforward of the Ghibellines as a faction within the walls of Florence. The old name, as a rallying cry for the Tory or Imperialist party, was still raised here and there in Tuscany; and Pisa still called herself Ghibelline. But the stream of progress had run past them, and left them stranded:—how effectually so is shown by the results of two attempts made by Rudolph of Hapsburg, the head of a new imperial house, to revive and enforce the imperial claims in Tuscany. The first was in 1281, when by concert with the remains of the Ghibelline party, "Messer Loddo, of Germany," was sent to recall the towns to their allegiance. But with the exception of Pisa and San Miniato, there was not a Commune, large or small, that would pay the least attention to his summons. He threw his small band of German forces into San Miniato, and attempted to rally the Ghibelline

\* Villani, book vii. chap. lvi.

A.D. party to a new war against Florence. But it was of no use.  
 1281. Nobody heeded his call, and he shortly returned to Germany having done nothing.\*

Again, four years later, another attempt was made in much humbler fashion than would have suited the old Fredericks and Henrys. The consent of the Pope was asked and obtained for the residence of a Conte da Lavagno, as Imperial Vicar in Tuscany. The circumstance that the Papal consent was given is a very significant proof how entirely things were altered since the old days when the Ghibelline party was a real thorn in the side not only of the Pope but of Florence. Now the Imperial Vicar very quietly came thither, and took up his quarters in the Mozzi palace. Thence he issued his summons "to the Florentines, the Sienese, the Lucchese, the Pistoians, and other towns of the Guelph faction in Tuscany."†—(from which passage we perceive that even in Siena the Ghibelline party was dead,)—commanding them to come and swear fidelity to the empire. But not a soul in any one of these communities paid the smallest attention to his appeal. So he condemned Florence to a fine of sixty thousand marks of silver, and left the city in dudgeon. But if he had gratified his resentment by condemning the city to pay sixty millions, it would have come to exactly the same thing. He pronounced similar fines on the other cities in proportion, with the same result. Then he betook himself to Arezzo, and endeavoured to rouse the Ghibelline party there. But nobody would pay any attention to him; and he returned to Germany, a rather ridiculous Imperial Vicar.‡

It was about this time also, in 1282, that an important and very significant change in the political constitution

\* Villani, book vii. chap. lxxviii.; Coppo Stefani, book ii. rub. clv.; Ammirato, book iii. ad an. 1281. The latter author says that the commune of Florence induced the Vicar to go away quietly by giving him a reasonable (conveniente) sum of money. Neither Villani nor Coppo Stefani make any allusion to such payment.

† Villani, book vii. chap. cxii.

‡ Villani, book vii. chap. cxii.

of the Commonwealth was effected. The old popular magistracy of the “Anziani del popolo” had been, after some other modification, finally replaced at the time when Cardinal Latino made peace in the city, by a board of fourteen notables, of whom eight were to be Guelphs and six Ghibellines. But this was shortly found to be unsatisfactory in many respects. The number was too large; the avowed distribution of seats in this supreme council, between the two old factions, was calculated to perpetuate divisions and party rivalry; and above all, such a provision tended to throw power into the hands of the chiefs of those parties—that is to say, of the nobles. But Florence had now advanced on the path which it was destined by the constitution of its social system inevitably to tread, sufficiently far to make such an arrangement intolerable to the classes next below those who thus monopolised power in the State. The institution of the guilds, and the military organisation in connection with them, will be remembered by the reader. The constitutional revolution now effected consisted in a small, and at first sight, not very important, completion and perfectionment of this institution. The scheme was devised by the merchants of the “Calimala,”—the traders in woollen stuffs of foreign manufacture, which were brought to Florence to be dressed and dyed, and then in great part re-exported. This was at that epoch the most important branch of the Florentine commerce. It was already a source of great wealth; and the guild of the Calimala consisted of the richest and most influential merchants of the community. This powerful guild proposed that “Priors”—*Priori*—the title being taken, as Villani tells us, from that passage in the Gospel where Christ says to his disciples, “*Vos estis priores*”—should be chosen by each guild, to preside over it; and that the priors of the three principal companies—that of Calimala, that of the money-changers, or bankers, and that of the manufac-

A.D.  
1282.



A.D.  
1282.

turers of woollen cloths—should form a council, in the place of the fourteen notables above mentioned, to be assessors of the “captain of the people,” and with him the supreme authority in the state. The three guilds named, however, were not able, and indeed do not appear to have attempted, to keep this great power and privilege exclusively in their own hands. Very shortly the number of the *Priori* was increased to six, by extending the privilege to other three of the *Arti Maggiori*; and before long, fourteen minor guilds—*Arti Minori*—having been instituted, and some of the principal of these having been added to the *Arti Maggiori*, so as to make up the entire number to twelve, the number of “*Priori*” forming the supreme council of state was, as in the time of the first “*Anziani del popolo*,” thus increased to twelve. To these was added, somewhat more than half a century later, as we shall see, the chief magistrate, entitled, GONFALONIERE; and the governmental body thus constituted was that world-celebrated “*Signoria*,” which was held in respect in every part of civilised Europe, and was at home the representative of the power and majesty of the Commonwealth.

The extreme jealousy of all authority, which always characterised the Florentine people, is notably shown in the regulation which limited the term of office of the “*Priori*” to two months. During this period the Priors lived together, at the cost of the State, away from their own homes and families, at first in the “*Badia*,” or Abbey of San Firenze.—that ancient convent with a remarkable reddish-coloured spire, close to the Bargello; and afterwards in the “*Palazzo del Comune*,” when that noble embodiment of the majesty of the Commonwealth, which was then in process of construction, was ready to receive them.

Of course, it will at once strike every reader, that the scheme of government thus established threw the whole

power of the state into the hands of the upper class of the “*bourgeoisie*,” and such, of course, was the object of the authors of it. It was not, however, intended, or, as Ammirato observes,\* it was not yet intended to exclude the nobility entirely from the government. It was therefore established that though none save a member of the guild was eligible to the office of Prior, matriculation on its books was a sufficient qualification for being elected. Any noble, therefore, who was disposed thus far to abdicate all claim to superiority of caste, and to acknowledge himself to be a citizen, in our modern sense of the word, might, by so doing, participate in all the rights of citizenship in the largest acceptation of the term.†

A.D.  
1283.

The new form of government seemed to promise well at starting. “In those days,” says Villani, “the city of Florence was in a good and happy state of repose, tranquil, and at peace, and prosperous for merchants and artizans.” ‡ And he goes on to give an account of the festivities that enlivened the city at the great festival of St. John, in the year 1283,—the first after the establishment of the new government. Down to the present day § the festival of St. John, on the 24th of June, has always been the great popular holiday of the year in Florence. But the nineteenth century does not keep its holidays as the thirteenth did. On the occasion in question, a band of choice spirits, a thousand strong, clubbed together, mainly under the leadership of the Rossi family, in the neighbourhood of the church of Santa Felicita, between the Ponte Vecchio and the (now) Piazza Pitti. They were arrayed all uniformly in white, and were ruled by a captain whose title

\* Ammirato, book iii. ad an. 1282.

† Villani, book vii. chap. lxxix.; Ammirato, *loc. cit.*

‡ Book vii. chap. lxxxix.

§ Not quite so. In 1860 the old Florentine celebration of the feast of St. John was abolished in favour of the new national festival, to be held throughout Italy on the first Sunday in June.

A.D.  
1283.

was "The Lord of Love." For two months, dating from the day of the festival, they kept up the game, spending the day and most of the night in marching through the streets of the city to the sound of trumpets and hautboys, in games of all sorts, in balls, and continual feasting. The tables were open to all comers; and any strangers arriving in Florence were not only made welcome, but were attended in their rides or walks through the city, and treated with all imaginable honour and all their needs provided for.

"And observe," says the historian, "that in those days the city of Florence and the citizens were in the most prosperous condition they had ever known, and it lasted till the year 1284, when division between the people and the grandees began, with reference to that between the *Bianchi* and the *Neri*. In those days there were in Florence some three hundred cavaliers, who kept open house, and many companies of knights and youngsters who had tables spread morning and evening, and on occasion of the festivals of Christmas and Easter they gave away numbers of furred dresses. All this brought men of pleasure, and jesters of all sorts to Florence in great numbers from Lombardy and all parts of Italy, and they were well received and made welcome; and no stranger of reputable position passed through Florence without these companies rivalling each other in inviting him, and accompanying him on horseback either within or without the city, according to his requirements."\*

\* Villani, book vii. chap. lxxxix.



## CHAPTER II.

War between Genoa and Pisa—Pisan defeat at Meloria—Florence takes the opportunity to attack Pisa—Ugolino della Gherardesca—Rivalries in Pisa—The Archbishop Ruggeri—Ugolino reproved by Marco Lombardi—Fall of Ugolino—His death in the *Torre della Fame*—Feud between Guelph and Ghibelline extinct within Florence—Modification of the Ghibelline Party—Enrichment of the commercial classes—Completion of the walls—*Loggia* of Or San Michele—Death of Charles of Anjou—Scarcity of Food in Italy—Prices—Charles II. of Anjou at Florence—Amerigo Nerbona in Florence—War with Arezzo—The Bishop Guglielmino—The forces on either side—Guido Novello—Departure of the army from Florence—The Casentino—Treason of the Bishop Guglielmino—Battle of Campaldino—Vieri de' Cerchi—Corso Donati—Dante Alighieri—Florentine Victory—The Florentine army before Arezzo—Cost of the war with Arezzo—Rejoicings in Florence.

MUNICIPAL jealousy, and, to a still greater degree, party spirit, led to quarrels between Florence and Pisa very shortly after the former became sufficiently powerful to attract the notice of the elder, and then far wealthier city. But enmity of a much deeper kind had long subsisted between Genoa and Pisa. The interests of both Pisa and Florence should have made the two cities friends. They should have been as closely allied as Manchester and Liverpool. Either had need of the other. Florence was the seat of more than one rising and flourishing branch of manufacture. Pisa was an entirely naval and mercantile power. The wars therefore between the two cities were not to the death, nor their enmities as yet of an irreconcilable nature. Between Genoa and Pisa the matter was different. Both these powerful communities lived, and prospered, and

A.D.  
1284. grew great by the same means. They ate of the same loaf, and each wanted the whole of it.

In that last quarter of the thirteenth century, which was signalised in Florence by the institution of the new form of government by the *Priori delle Arti*, war had broken out anew between Genoa and Pisa, immediately and avowedly by reason of certain disputes connected with the government of the island of Sardinia, but really and fundamentally from the hatred and jealousy of rival commercial communities, each anxious to ruin and destroy the other. Pisa had already sustained more than one defeat; but burning to avenge herself and to injure her rival, she prepared a new fleet of seventy galleys, and in July, 1284, sailed for Genoa. The Genoese, being unprepared, remained within their walls, and replied to the taunts of their enemies that it would not be courteous if Genoa were to beat them in her own waters; but that she would come in her own good time, and give them the meeting they were so anxious for. The Pisans, therefore, shot a silver arrow into the town, as an expression of insult and contempt, and returned with much vain-glorious talk to their own city. Genoa, however, fully intended to be as good as her word. She equipped with all speed a fleet of an hundred and thirty galleys, and sailed for the Pisan waters. "The Pisans when they heard this got into their galleys with cries and much noise, some at Porto Pisano,\* and some in Pisa; and the podestà and the admiral, and all their best men went on board the galleys in Pisa between the two bridges on the Arno, and raised their standard with great rejoicings; and the Archbishop of Pisa and all his clergy were there on the bridge—which was decked out with upholstery—to give the army his blessing; and while he was doing it the ball and the cross that were on the

\* The fort of Pisa, at the mouth of the Arno, which was then considerably nearer Pisa than it now is.

mast of the standard fell, and many wise men deemed that it was an omen of coming evil. Yet they would not abandon the enterprise, but, crying, 'To arms! to arms!' with great pride, they went forth out of the estuary of the Arno." \* Their force amounted to eighty-three galleys; and they met the Genoese fleet off a little island rock called Meloria; exactly at the spot where they had, about fifty years before, routed the Genoese, and impiously taken and drowned a number of prelates on their way from France to the Council at Rome called together by Gregory IX. And of course that circumstance was recalled, and pointed out as the cause of the signal defeat of the Pisans which followed.

A.D.  
1284.

"Great and fierce was the battle, and many brave men perished there on either side, slain or drowned in the sea. At last, as it pleased God, the Genoese were the victors; and the Pisans were defeated with immense loss of life; for the dead and the captives amounted to sixteen thousand men; and there remained in the hands of the enemy forty of the Pisan galleys, besides many others wrecked and sunk. And the Genoese took the galleys, with the prisoners, to Genoa, without any pomp or other manifestation of triumph, beyond causing masses to be said, processions to be made, and thanks to be offered to God; for which conduct they were very much praised. In Pisa there was much grief and great wailing, for there was not a house nor a family that had not more than one among the dead and the captives. And from that day forth Pisa never recovered her prosperity nor her power." †

The Florentines, however, amid their own prosperity, saw in this great calamity of their rival a fine opportunity for taking advantage of her weakness. So a league was made between Florence, Lucca, Siena, Pistoia, Prato, Genoa,

\* Villani, book vii. chap. xcii.

† Villani, *ibid.*; Ammirato, ad an. 1284.



A.D.  
1286.

and other smaller communities, for the purpose of utterly destroying Pisa. But Ugolino della Gherardesca, who, though a Guelph, was at that time the most powerful citizen in Pisa, thought, as it should seem, that he saw in this position of matters a possibility of making himself absolute master of the city. With this view he secretly opened communications with the Florentines; and by representing that he had the means of driving the Pisan Ghibellines out of Pisa and making it altogether a Guelph city, and, as it is asserted, also by bribery, induced them to break their faith with their allies, and make peace separately with Pisa. The Florentine historians maintain that this defection of theirs from the league, which drew upon them the indignation of their allies, especially of Genoa and Lucca, bent as they were on the utter extermination of Pisa, was the means of saving her in her extremity; and bitterly reproach her for ingratitude on occasions of her subsequent hostility to her preserver. There is every reason to suppose that the Florentine statements are correct in this respect, and that had Florence remained true to her engagements, Pisa must have perished. But if so, it follows that Count Ugolino was doing well for his country, whatever his motives may have been, in thus inducing Florence to break up the league; and that the charge of treason which was afterwards brought against him on this ground at least was unjust. But it is exceedingly probable that he was aiming at the acquisition of despotic power in Pisa. The fact is, that there were three parties in the city who were probably all attempting the same thing: a division of the Guelph party, friends of Ugolino; another portion of the Guelphs who were in favour of a nephew of Ugolino, called the Judge of Gallura, from having held that position in the island of Sardinia; and a Ghibelline party, at the head of which were the Archbishop Ruggeri degli Ubaldini, and other Ghibelline

nobles. And a match of mutual treachery seems to have been played between them, in which the Archbishop, as the deepest-dyed traitor of all, won the game. A.D.  
1288.

Count Ugolino first conspired with him and his party to secure the expulsion of the Judge of Gallura. The Archbishop seemed to range himself entirely on his side ; and he appeared to have reached, or to be on the point of reaching, the summit of his ambition. On his birthday in the year 1288, being now if not absolute lord of Pisa, yet so pre-eminent a citizen in the State as to lack little of that position, even as at a later period was the case with the founders of the Medicean tyranny in Florence, the Count Ugolino gave an ostentatious and magnificent festival, to which all his race and immediate supporters were bidden. And the chronicles record how, when all was prepared and the guests about to arrive, the Count, in the pride of his heart, called a certain wise and discreet man, named Marco Lombardo, and showing him all the preparations and all the magnificence, said : “ Well, Marco, what do you think of it ? ” “ I think this,” answered the wise man, “ that with all these preparations you stand a better mark for some great misfortune than any other man this day in Italy.” And when the Count, somewhat frightened, said, “ What mean you, Marco ? ” the reply was—“ This I mean : that thought has been taken for everything here . . . . save for the wrath of God ! ” The wise Marco judged rightly enough that there was that in the public temper in Pisa which made the position of the Count a critical one, and that this ostentatious display was a very dangerous indulgence of vanity at such a moment, and under the eyes of a populace always angered by the sight of individual pre-eminence. Nor was it otherwise than abundantly true, that Ugolino had more than enough on his conscience to make a man fear the wrath of Heaven. But the manner and spirit in which the anecdote is related by the old

A.D. 1288. writers, shows curiously how far from extinguished in the Italian mind of that day was the old pagan idea, that the culmination of human prosperity and happiness was in itself displeasing to the gods, and likely to be visited by their wrath.

At all events, wise Marco was right enough. The Archbishop was but biding his time to hurl down the fellow-conspirator whom he had helped to climb. On the 30th of June there was “*rumor armorum in civitate Pisarum*,”\*—a noise of arms in the city of the Pisans;—and on the next day the people, led on by the Archbishop, seized the Count and several of his sons and grandsons, and imprisoned them in the celebrated “*Torre della Fame*,” which had been previously called the “*Torre dei Gualandi*,” but originally the “*Torre della Sette Vie*,” where they all died of starvation. It is remarkable that the Florentine historians represent that they were shut up in the tower, doomed avowedly to perish by hunger.† But the Pisan chroniclers say that the sentence pronounced on them was not death by starvation or otherwise, but a fine of “five thousand pounds weight of money,” which, having already paid three previous fines, they had not the means of discharging; and were allowed to die of hunger in default of producing the money.‡

\* Fram. Hist. Pisan. Guidom de Corvaria; a queer old diarist, who, though he had elsewhere a wife and family, enters in his diary towards the end of 1285, “Die . . . (left blank) . . . a certain daughter (*filia quædam*) was born to me in Carraia, named Franceschina.” And a few months later, “I assumed the habit of the blessed Francis; and on the same day Pretiosa, my companion, (*‘socia mia’*) clothed herself in similar weeds.” He renounces the habit, however, before the year of noviciate is out; but we hear no more of Pretiosa;—and are somewhat reminded of one of those French stories of suicide à deux, in which the stronger vessel is apt to survive his wounds.

† Villani, book vii. chap. cxxviii.

‡ Fram. Hist. Pisan. duct. Anon., printed in the 24th vol. of Muratori Script. Rerum. Ital., see p. 255. The above-cited diary is also printed in the same volume, see p. 694. See also for the details of the political party



The celebrated passage in the 33rd Canto of the *Inferno* is too well known for it to be necessary to quote it at length. And indeed were it not for the undying interest which the poet's touch has imparted to the horrible tragedy, and the consequent celebrity of the story, it would hardly have been worth while to detain the reader by occupying him with details which belong to the history of Pisa rather than that of Florence.

A.D.  
1288.

The period marked by the great naval battle of Meloria, which, as Villani justly remarks, was the commencement of the decline of the Pisan greatness and power, may be considered also as about the time when the tide of the Florentine fortunes just began to touch the high-water mark. The great party division of Guelphs and Ghibellines, which had been the misfortune and well nigh the ruin of the community on so many occasions, was no longer so clearly marked as to be a source of danger to the Commonwealth. Not that the animosity and rivalry of those two great parties was at an end in Italy, or had ceased to vex other cities and influence the foreign policy of Florence; but within the walls that danger was over, and another was beginning to loom on the political horizon. The nobles of both parties found themselves in the presence of a power which they began to perceive was greater than that of both of them put together; and the future danger arose from the tendency of this preponderance to increase and become overwhelming. But this evil was as yet in the future. And though no doubt lamentations, dismay at "what the world was coming to," and dismal vaticinations, were rife in noble homes, yet with few exceptions the Florentine nobles did not refuse to avail them-

movements which led to the downfall of Ugolino, Villani, book vii. chap. cxxi.; Ammirato, book iii. ad an. 1288; Rencioni, *Istorie Pisane*, printed in *Archivio Storico Italiano*, vol. vi. p. 640. These authorities may be consulted for the purpose mentioned in this note; but no details whatsoever of the horrible catastrophe itself will be found.

A.D.  
1285. selves of that means of continuing to exercise a fair share of influence in the government which the legislation of the recent revolution had left open to them. They for the most part did put their names on the books of some one of the civic companies, and did thus obtain a very tolerable portion of the honours and power of the State. Some few families there were, men of that strong hard-fibred sort of character who, when once moulded in a certain form, can by no change of circumstance be fashioned into any other,—men of the class destined in every age of the world to be left stranded by the changing stream-course of the world's progress,—men perhaps by no means the least respectable of their class, who consistently refused to bend in any way to the yoke put upon them; who shut themselves up in their palaces, and gradually, refusing to move onward, were left behind in the world's race, and sank into poverty and comparative obscurity.

And this result happened the more quickly, for that all around them was moving onward swiftly. Wealth was increasing in the city with great rapidity. Large fortunes were made in all three of those "*Arti Maggiori*" which have been named:—the dealers in foreign cloths sent to Florence to be dressed and dyed; the manufacturers of woollen cloths; and the bankers. The largest fortunes were at this period of the history of the Commonwealth probably made in the first of those trades. A little later, when Florence assumed in Europe that position and those functions in conducting the monetary business of the world which now belong to London, the most colossal fortunes were made, or lost, by the bankers of Florence.

The increasing prosperity of the city showed itself in the necessity of once again enlarging the circuit of its walls. The work of enclosing the large and populous suburbs—" *borghi*," as they were called—with which the overflow of the population had surrounded the city on all sides, was

begun in 1285. Much about the same period the superb “*loggia*,” or open arcade of Or San Michele,\* was erected. As it is now seen, the exquisitely beautiful arches have been built up with dead wall: and the space enclosed is used for a church. When built as an open “*loggia*,” it was intended for a grain market.

A.D.  
1286.

In that same year (1285) Charles of Anjou died; and as the head and patron of all Guelphs and Guelphism in Italy, was lamented and praised by the Florentine historians. He was not so necessary to them, however, as he had once been; and the good city held on her way with an uninterrupted tranquillity, which marks noticeably enough the contrast with the times but a little further back, when the death of a foreign potentate caused sudden revolution, and reversed all the relationships of the great parties in the State.

It is recorded—and the record is worth giving as a criterion of price and of the value of money—that in the next year, 1286, there was a great scarcity of food throughout Italy, which was at the worst in April and May, during which months wheat in Florence was worth a fraction more than half a golden florin a bushel, *i.e.*, the sixteenth part of an ounce of pure gold.†

There were, however, plenty of ounces of golden florins in Florence to pay for the food that was needed; and having briefly mentioned the circumstance, the historian goes on his way recording the successes and prosperities of the Commonwealth.

In 1282, a few years before Charles of Anjou's death, the unhappy Sicilians had made that desperate leap of the Sicilian Vespers from the frying-pan of French insolence and insult into the fire of Spanish tyranny. And now

\* Or for Orto, a garden. This was the open ground on which, as it will be remembered, the Uberti were beheaded.

† Villani, book vii. chap. iii.



A.D.  
1286.

Charles his son, having been let out of prison, came to Florence on his way southward to plead his cause before the giver of kingdoms—at that time Nicholas IV.—who was then at Rieti. He remained three days at Florence, and was treated with all the honour that a Guelph city could show to the hereditary chief of the Guelph faction. But when he was about to proceed on his journey, tidings came to Florence that the men of Arezzo, in which city for some little time past the Ghibelline party had been drawing to a head and striving to prepare themselves for some blow that might open to them a path to the power and influence which they had lost in Tuscany, were minded to come forth from their walls and bar the way against the young Guelph prince. Whereupon Florence at once put eight hundred cavaliers into the saddle, and turned out a force of three thousand infantry, to escort the prince on his road. And though it was soon ascertained that this demonstration had sufficed to make the Arezzo Ghibellines abandon their plan, and though Charles assured them that it was unnecessary, the Florentines insisted on accompanying him to the frontier of the Commune of Orvieto. And when they parted there, the authorities of the “most republican of republics,” who, despite their jealousy and dislike of their native aristocracy, manifested on many occasions a truly *bourgeois* admiration for foreign potentates, requested the prince to lend them a general, and to continue to them the privilege of hoisting the royal standard of his house whenever their armies took the field. Of course the French prince graciously acceded to their prayer; and the noble knight Amerigo Nerbona was left with a hundred horsemen to return with them to Florence.\*

No sooner had the little army which had accompanied Charles II. of Anjou on his journey returned to Florence, bringing with them Messer Amerigo di Nerbona and his

\* Villani, book vii. chap. cxx.

troop of men-at-arms, than preparations were made for an expedition against Arezzo. The historian Ammirato maintains \* that Arezzo was bent on aggression, and that Florence, foreseeing that she would have to fight, judged it best to carry the war on to the Aretine territory rather than wait to have it at her own gates. But it is remarkable, that the presence of foreign leaders and their mercenary troops in Florence always produced, or at all events immediately preceded, war with some of the neighbouring communities. And all experience teaches that the existence of an armed force is a dangerous provocative to the use of it.

A.D.  
1289.

It is true that there was at that time in Arezzo a turbulent, ambitious, and restless man, the Bishop Guglielmino degli Ubertini, a furious Ghibelline, as might be supposed from his name, and a member of that family who on so many occasions had given trouble to Florence. He had obtained great power at Arezzo; and although his attempts to reinstate the Ghibelline party in their ascendancy there had been already once or twice checked by Florentine expeditions against that city, he was still striving to organize a vast coalition with the scattered fragments of the Ghibelline power, chiefly in districts beyond the limits of Tuscany. Altogether he had collected a force of eight thousand infantry, and eight hundred cavaliers, officered by several captains of high reputation, Buonconte of Montefeltro, Guglielmino de' Pazzi of the Valdarno, and others, without counting his own Right Reverend arm, which was evidently far more at home with the sword than the crozier. The captain in chief of the Aretine forces was not, however, a leader calculated to inspire an army with confidence, being no other than our old acquaintance Count Guido Novello, then Podestà of Arezzo, whose conduct upon this occasion was quite in keeping with

A.D. 1289. what we saw of him when he ran away out of Florence from a popular riot, while the "Fрати Gaudenti" were screaming to him from the window not to be in such a hurry.

The Florentine army consisted of six hundred citizens, "the best mounted and armed that ever went out of Florence," \* and four hundred foot soldiers, besides the troop of Amerigo di Nerbona. Lucca sent five hundred cavaliers; Prato forty, and some foot soldiers; Pistoia sixty, and some infantry; Siena one hundred and twenty, and Volterra forty cavaliers. There were also contingents from Bologna, Sanminiato, San Gemignano, Colle, and some other places. Several of the landowners of the country districts who had embraced Guelph principles, and recognised the suzerainty of Florence, also brought their retainers. Altogether the Florentine army consisted of sixteen hundred cavaliers and ten thousand infantry;—a very far superior force to that at the disposition of the fighting Bishop. The latter, however, contained a very much smaller proportion of civic troops, being almost entirely composed of the retainers of the great Ghibelline barons, soldiers by profession, as such deemed even by the Florentine writers necessarily and naturally more than a match for the citizen bands. It is curious to find the leaders of these Ghibelline troopers encouraging them to scorn the superior numbers of the city forces, by sneering at the effeminacy of their habits, and assuring their soldiers that they were creatures who combed their hair like women, and thought more of taking care of their own persons than of their arms.

It was on the 13th of May, 1289, that Florence formally declared war against Arezzo, with the old formality of raising the banner of the Commonwealth for eight days on the Abbey tower on the hill of Ripoli, † before putting

\* Villani, book vii. chap. cxxxi.

† A hamlet two or three miles from Florence, just behind St. Miniato.



the army in motion, so that it should not be said that Florence attacked anybody without giving them fair notice. It is not easy to understand of what avail this notice could be to a city forty miles distant; but the loyal custom was evidently preserved from that good old time when the frontier of the state was, as Dante wished it had remained, not above some three miles from the city.

A. D.  
1289.

On this occasion, however, the eight days seemed to have been extended to eighteen. For it was not till the 2nd of June that the united host marched out of Florence, while all the bells rang out their God speed! and took its way towards the Casentino. The fertile district so called, consists of the upper valley of the Arno, which, after having approached to within two or three miles of Arezzo, makes a sudden sweep and pursues its way to Florence in a direction almost the reverse of that it had previously followed. The high ground which it thus sweeps around and partially encloses, rises to a very considerable elevation, and is called the Prato Magno, a bleak region of open downs, in some parts still covered with forest, and probably entirely so at the date of which we are speaking. This high mountain ridge has therefore to be crossed by any one who would go from Florence into the Casentino without following the much longer route by the course of the river. This long upper valley of the Arno, shut in by the main chain of the chestnut and pine covered Apennines to the left of one looking down the stream, and to the right by the long mass of the Prato Magno, is an exceedingly pleasant and fruitful district; and besides some other townlets of lesser note, contains the strong castle and town of Poppi, built on an isolated hill in the centre of it, and the thriving town of Bibbiena at the further extremity, —at the end of the valley, that is, furthest from Florence and nearest to Arezzo.

Poppi and its castle were the property and stronghold of

A.D.  
1289.

Count Guido Novello, now Podestà of Arezzo, which city, it would seem, did not make a point of going so far afield in search of its Podestàs as Florence had by statute bound herself to do. All around and beneath Poppi lay the flourishing lands belonging to Count Guido. And the main motive which induced the Florentines to take this road to Arezzo, rather than the nearer and easier one by the river, was the desire of laying waste the estates of their old acquaintance, now the captain-general of the enemy's army. The Arezzo men, on their side, as soon as they learned the direction the Florentine army had taken, hastened into the Casentino at their end of it, hoping to be in time, if not to save the property of their Podestà from destruction, at least to protect Bibbiena, on which the enemy would next fall.

Just as the Arezzo host were marching out, circumstances came to the knowledge of its leaders which led them to suspect that their fighting Bishop, who had been the chief promoter and agent of the Ghibelline league and gathering, was in traitorous correspondence with the Florentines. It was afterwards known that he had in fact bargained with them to betray into their hands Bibbiena, and many other towns and castles of his bishopric, in return for a pension of fifty thousand golden florins a year for his life.

Those good old times, the "ages of faith" in an ecclesiastical sense, were assuredly marked to a very extraordinary degree by faithlessness in a secular sense. But it is impossible to read many pages of their annals without coming upon facts which go to prove that the most slippery of all dangerous customers to deal with in those ages was a bishop.

At that critical moment, however, all that could be done was to hurry forwards, and give battle at once. The two armies accordingly met on a small plain in the valley

beneath Poppi, a little on the Florence side of that town, at a spot called Campaldino, which has accordingly given its name to one of the most celebrated battles of Florentine history. The fight took place on Saturday, the 11th of June, 1289, “the day of St. Barnabas the Apostle, and the two hosts by common accord placed themselves in array in front of each other in more perfect order on either side than in any other battle ever fought in Italy.”\* A.D.  
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The disposition on both sides was similar, either host distributing its forces into four divisions. The first of these consisted of a body of “*feditori*,” *wounders*, literally; but the word in this case means *attackers*. This was the post of honour. No regiment or company *en masse* was appointed to the duty; but it was assigned to a certain number of cavaliers, selected individually, man by man, from those most noted for dash and conspicuous personal prowess in all the army. At Campaldino, Messer Vieri de’ Cerchi, of whom we shall hear more hereafter, having, as one of the captains of the army, to select the “*feditori*,” acquired great renown by insisting on being among them himself, though suffering from a wound in the leg at the time,—naming his own son and nephews the first, and refusing after that to admit any, save volunteers, into the band. “So that,” says Villani, “many nobles placed themselves among the *feditori* from shame.”

Behind this first rank was drawn up the solid mass of the bulk of the army, the greater part of the infantry, with a portion of the horse. Solidity and firmness were the qualities here most required. Their business it was to sustain the shock and weight of the hostile force, and to do so without yielding ground. At a little distance, again, behind these was drawn up all the baggage and camp equipage, with several companies of veterans to protect it, and

\* Villani, book vii. chap. cxxxi.



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1289. assist in supporting the second body if they should show signs of giving way. Fourthly, there was a body of reserve, cavalry mainly, drawn up at some little distance, on a rising ground probably if possible, whose duty it was to watch the fight, and strike at the moment and in the place where such a blow might best serve to decide the fortune of the day. On the occasion in question, Corso Donati, of whom also we shall hear more, was in command of this body ; and was charged not to move at the peril of his life without orders.

In one of these four divisions of the Florentine host, but in which of them there is no record to tell, there was a young citizen soldier, just twenty-four years old, named Dante Alighieri.

The Arezzo men were the first to begin the attack. Spurring their horses, they dashed against the Florentine ranks with such fury that the main mass of the army was driven back for a space. But it did not break ; and having recovered a little from the first shock stood immoveably firm. But at this crisis the contrasted conduct of the two leaders of the reserved force on either side probably decided the fortune of the day. Count Guido Novello, the Aretine Podestà, at the moment when he should have spurred forward against the momentarily wavering Florentine line, was stricken with panic, and galloped off the field to the shelter of his neighbouring castle of Poppi. Messer Corso Donati, on the other hand, who had not received the order to advance for which he had been charged to wait, could not control his impatience, but crying out, “ If we lose the day, I prefer to die with my fellow-citizens on the field ! If we win, anybody who likes may come to Pistoia (of which city he was Podestà at the time) to see me beheaded for breaking orders ! In any case, here goes ! ” He dashed forward, and delivered a charge on the enemy in flank, which did much towards winning the battle.

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The upshot was the entire rout of the Aretine and Ghibelline army. One thousand seven hundred were left by them dead on the field. More than two thousand prisoners were taken. Many were released, either, says Villani, for money or for friendship's sake. But seven hundred and forty were taken in bonds to Florence. Among the dead was found Guglielmino degli Ubertini, the bishop, "who was," says Villani, "a great warrior;"—making no further observation concerning him. Many other Ghibellines of note also perished at Campaldino. The loss of the Florentines was very light in comparison.

The news of the great victory reached Florence that same night, a distance of about thirty-five miles, as Villani thought by some supernatural means. Their lordships the *Priori*, he tells us, had gone to bed after their dinner, being tired out by having been up, busy and anxious, all the previous night in sending forth the army. When suddenly a knock came at the door of the room where they were sleeping, and a voice cried out, "Get up! get up! for the Aretines are beaten!" But when they got up and opened the door, and questioned the servants, nobody was to be seen or heard of. "And it was held," says the historian, "to be a most wonderful and notable thing, for it was the hour of Vespers before the first bearers of the news arrived. And this is true, for I saw it and heard it; and all the Florentines marvelled much what it might mean!"

The Florentine army marched immediately on Bibbiena, and, having taken it without any resistance, lost eight days in plundering and destroying the walls of the town. And these eight days saved Arezzo. Had they pushed on at once to Arezzo, they had surely taken the city. But the eight days' respite thus allowed to the beaten army gave them time to collect themselves and take all means of securing the safety of the town. So that when the Florentines arrived before the walls, they were forced to content

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themselves with laying waste the gardens and fields around the town, and playing off a variety of those pranks which these mediæval citizen armies found so exceedingly diverting in the execution, and so glorious in the subsequent boasting of them, when they were the aggressive party, and so intolerably irritating when they were made the subjects of them. Thus before the walls of Arezzo, the Florentines, if they could not take the city, could at least insult the inhabitants by flinging asses over the walls with mitres on their heads, as a taunt having a severely satirical reference to their late bishop and his fate. They also, on the 24th of June, the anniversary of the great Florentine festival of St. John, got up a counterpart of the various games and amusements which they would have been engaged in had they been at home on that day; the understood significance of the taunt being, that they were so much at their ease there on the enemy's territory and in sight of his walls, and so little apprehensive of his daring to interfere with them, that they could act as if in perfect security at home within their own walls.

Certainly these people were very young—very boy-like; and the world becomes older as it rolls on in more senses than one!

The total cost of this expedition amounted, as we are told by Villani, to 36,000 golden florins,—4500 ounces of pure gold, that is to say,—which was paid by the Commonwealth by an income-tax of six and a quarter per cent.\*

“And Florence exulted greatly,” he goes on to say, “over this victory; and became exceedingly flourishing and prosperous, more so than it had ever been up to that time; and it increased largely in population and in riches, for every one made large gains in every sort of commerce, art, and trade. And the city continued in peace and tranquillity for several

\* Paid, it is to be understood once, and laid on specially for the occasion.



years afterwards, rising in importance and power every day. And by reason of the general happiness and flourishing condition, every year in the first days of May, companies were formed, and bands of young gentlemen, all in new clothing, used to put up booths of cloth and silk, and enclosures of timber, in various parts of the city. And the women and girls did the like, going all through the city dancing and paired in order, with musical instruments, and with garlands of flowers on their heads, passing their time in play and merriment, and in dinners and suppers.” \*

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A merry world, my masters! And young communities, as well as young folks, will be young.

\* Villani, book vii. chap. cxxxii.: Ammirato, book iii. ad an. 1289; Coppo Stefani, book iii. rubr. clxxxi.; Dino Compagni, *Istoria Fiorentina*, Firenze, 1728, book i. pp. 8, 9.

### CHAPTER III.

The government of the *Priori*—Rise of the people to importance and power—Giano della Bella—*Ordini della Giustizia*—The object of the code so called—Provisions contained in the “*Ordini*”—Disfranchisement of the nobles—First execution under the “*Ordini*”—Complaints of the nobles—Conspiracy against Giano della Bella—Defects of the “*Ordini*”—Popular insurrection—Giano is banished—Prosperity coincident with great disturbances—Ancient commerce less sensitive than modern—Character of the Florentine merchants—Palazzo del Comune—Cathedral of Florence—Cimabue—Giotto—Tuscan language—Dante—Guido Cavalcanti—Twelve Florentine Ambassadors at Rome in 1300—Saying of Boniface VIII.

THE pleasant and prosperous state of things described at the close of the preceding chapter did not last long in Florence. The historian Villani expresses the singular opinion, that too great a degree of tranquillity bred—as generally, he says, is the case—a disorderly and aggressive spirit among the people.\* Ammirato, however, writing somewhat over two centuries later, says, more in accordance with the lessons which the world now conceives itself to have learned from experience, that the habits engendered by long years of nearly constant warfare, had produced a spirit of ferocity, violence, and lawlessness among the inhabitants of all classes, especially the great and powerful.† All the contemporary accounts agree in representing lawlessness to have been rife in Florence. The last change in the constitution—that which had entrusted the supreme power to the *Priori* of the Guilds—was not found to work

\* Villani, book viii. chap. i.

† Ammirato, book iv. p. 1.

satisfactorily. "The functions entrusted to them," writes a contemporary historian,\* "were, in short to guard and protect the property of the Commune; to take care that the judges rendered justice to every man, and that the poor and powerless were not oppressed by the great and powerful; and had they done so, the service to the people would have been great. But very soon all this was changed; for the citizens who filled those offices (the Priori) did not strive to observe, but to corrupt, the laws. If any friend or connection of their own incurred the penalties of the law, they contrived, by influencing the magistrates and the officials, to hide their crimes, so that they remained unpunished. Nor did they preserve the property of the Commune, but, on the contrary, found means of stealing from it, and drew from the exchequer chamber large sums, under pretext of rewarding public services. The poor were not protected, but the great wronged them, as also did the rich burgesses (*popolani grassi*) who held those offices, and who were often connected with the nobles by marriage; and frequently criminals were allowed to purchase impunity: all which caused discontent among worthy citizens of the people, and raised an outcry against the priors, because the Guleph nobles were in power."

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The evils complained of, it will be observed, were much of the same nature as those which had led to the appointment of a foreign Podestà. The Florentine magistrates could not be trusted to administer justice with purity, or deal honestly with the public money. Provision was made for assuring to the popular element in the body social a

\* Dino Compagni. His valuable chronicle runs from 1280 to 1312. He took a leading part in the politics and government of the city; and his short record of the facts which fell under his observation has more of the character of history than any other of the chronicles of that period. It has the disadvantage of being very obscure in style. It has been printed by Muratori, in his great collection, *Script. Rerum. Ital.*, and again by D. M. Manni, in 4to, Florence, 1728. The latter edition is here cited. For the passage in the text, see p. 5.



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preponderating share of the administrative power : and it turned out that matters were not much mended. They were citizens, indeed, who were in power ; but they were “ fat citizens ” all of them,—*popolani grassi*—men who had already begun to intermarry with the nobles ; so that in fact it came to be the same thing as having the Guelph nobles in power, which was only one step better than having the old-time Ghibellines back again. The Ghibellines, indeed, have been got rid of for good and all—have dwindled and disappeared from the public life of Florence, to be met with in distant provinces, or here and there, in obscure poverty and proud isolation—harmless fossils—in the retirement of those homes which had been so often ruined and confiscated. The likely men among them—those of the sort who will not submit to be left stranded by the running stream of progress—had changed themselves into Guelphs ; and had barely done so when it already became evident that they must adapt themselves to yet further changes if they would not be left behind the world. The Guelphs were already confounding themselves with the plebeian citizens, or at least with the fatter sort among them, and were candidates for power and place by virtue of the association. But the tide was running very rapidly, and the *thin* citizens were now beginning to cry out that their fat fellow-plebeians were little better than nobles ;—that, in point of fact, it was much the same thing as having Guelph nobles in office. Might it be that this backsliding of burgher magistrates into all the evil ways of the nobles was in fact due to that special circumstance of their fatness ? We have abolished the Ghibellines, and have found the Guelphs very little better than they. We have taken our affairs out of their hands, and have entrusted them to the fattest among ourselves ; and now they consort with nobles, intermarry with them, and govern us not a bit better than they did. May it not,

perchance, be because of their fatness? and may it not become necessary that we outside thin ones should take the matter into our own hands?

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It is an awkward corner in its social life for a community to turn, when the thin people begin to think and speak thus of the "fat" ones.

For the present, however, the Florentines were content to hope that the mischief might be mainly due to that mixture of the old patrician element which had crept in and adulterated the pure citizenship of the "*popolani grassi*." Let us try the result of thoroughly purging our ruling class of all that old leaven!

So, in February of the year 1293, a number of the discontented procured the election to the *Priorato* of a notable citizen, named Giano della Bella, a wealthy trader, much respected in the town, who was himself smarting under a gross insult he had received from a Frescobaldi, one who was a stanch supporter of popular government, and who was exceedingly indignant at the abuses and injustices of which preceding governments had been guilty. He seems to have been a thoroughly honest and sincere man, violent in his sentiments, and more courageous than discreet or prudent. By his influence, and as it would seem mainly by him, an entire new code of laws was enacted, under the title of Ordinances of Justice—" *Ordini della Giustizia*,"—which were not intended to replace any part of the legislation then in vigour in the city, but to act as a subsidiary code for the special purpose of repressing the violence and overbearing pride of the nobles. A new officer was at the same time appointed, with the title of "*Gonfaloniere della Giustizia*," who was to be the president of the Board of Priori. A standard bearing the arms of the Florentine people—a red cross in a white field—was given into his care; and from this symbol of his office—*gonfalone*—was derived the title which has become

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the best known throughout Europe of all the multiplied magistracies of the Florentine Commonwealth. A thousand completely armed soldiers, bearing the same cognizance, were placed under his command for the execution of the provisions of that special body of laws which it was his duty to administer.

The body of laws thus enacted was drawn up in Latin; but a translation into the vulgar tongue was made for the use of the magistrates and people, which is considered by those best versed in the history of the Tuscan language, to be a very remarkable composition in point of diction and style, and a proof that the use and amelioration of the modern Italian had made greater progress at that early date than has been generally supposed.

This document has been recently published by Signor Giudici in his History of the Italian Municipalities,\* in which work it occupies no less than a hundred and twenty full-sized and closely-printed octavo pages. The scope and animus of the entire code, may, however, be easily stated. The avowed and sole object of the "*Ordini della Giustizia*" was to exclude the nobles from the common rights of citizenship, and to enact new, special, and more summary penalties against any noble guilty of injuring in any way a plebeian.

All nobles are to be excluded from the government. Dino Compagni, in speaking summarily of the new provisions, says that all the members of every family in which there was any "*cavaliere*,"—any member of knightly rank—were made incapable of being elected. But though the language of the statute is by no means precise or very clear, it seems to me that only "*cavaliers*" themselves are excluded. Probably the original text may have been altered by some subsequent disposition in the sense given

\* Storia politica dei Municipii Italiani di Paolo Emiliani-Giudici; Firenze, 1851.



by Dino Compagni. Certainly the general intention was to disqualify all men of noble race. A.D.  
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All canvassing for election to offices—all meetings with a view to promote the election of any candidate—all requests to any elector for his vote, are forbidden, under the penalty of heavy fines.\*

Any noble killing a man of the people, or wounding him so that he dies in consequence of the wound, shall be beheaded, his house shall be destroyed, and all his possessions forfeited to the Commune. Any noble procuring another person to commit similar acts shall be similarly punished. And there are some singular provisions defining the extent of this liability to the charge of procuring a murderous assault, which illustrate the condition of society at the time in a curious manner. Two individuals only shall be capitally punished in any case for one assassination, namely, one “*capitano*”—ringleader—of the actual perpetrators of the deed, and one “*capitano*” of the procurers or inciters to the deed. And these ringleaders shall be designated, among all those implicated, by the relatives of the slain man. But should they, when called upon to do so, neglect or decline to exercise such right, then the Podestà—Captain of the People—or other magistrate before whom the matter has been tried, shall name such ringleaders. All other nobles present at the commission of the crime shall be fined two thousand lire. Any noble striking a plebeian in the face, so that blood follows the blow, in such sort that the wound put the injured man to shame,† or wounding or striking him with any iron instrument in any other part of his body, in such sort that weakness of the wounded part shall remain as a consequence thereof, shall be fined two thousand lire. And if such fines be not paid within ten days, the right hand

\* Ordini della Giustizia, chap. v.; Storia dei Municipii, p. 320.

† “E la fedita fosse vituperevole.”—*Ibid.* chap. iv. p. 323.

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of the defaulter shall be cut off, “so that it be separated from the arm.” Procurers of such assaults are to be similarly punished. And the same provisions respecting the restriction of principals to two persons, and the designation of these, as in the case of murder, are repeated.

If the Podestà shall, when informed by the Gonfaloniere of any such crime committed by a noble, neglect for five days in a capital case, or for eight days in a less grave matter, to proceed against the guilty, he shall in the former case be deposed from his office, and in the latter forfeit five hundred silver florins of his salary. And it shall in such case become the duty of the Captain of the People to proceed to execute justice, under similar penalties if he should neglect to do so; and in the case of such neglect of their duty by either of these officers, all the shops in the city of Florence shall be shut and kept shut, and no business shall be transacted therein until such time as justice shall have been done in the manner above prescribed; and all the citizens shall be armed, and continue so, until execution shall have been done on the guilty parties.

And further—(I will translate the passage literally from the original by way of a specimen of the style and animus of this celebrated and characteristic document)—“In order that the felonious audacity of those who are not afraid to commit such deeds may be restrained as it ought to be, and for the honour of the government of Messer la Podestà, and for the conservation of the liberties and good condition of the people, it is provided and ordained, that in case any of the nobles of the city or territory of Florence should commit or cause to be committed any injury against the person of any man of the people (*popolano*) of the city or territory, so that from such injury death should ensue, or shameful disfigurement of face, or amputation of limb by reason of any disfiguring wound, Messer la

Podestà of the city of Florence shall be bound and constrained by his own oath, immediately and without any delay, as soon as the perpetration of any such crime shall be brought to his knowledge, in concert with the Gonfaloniere, to cause his tocsin to be rung, and make public proclamation through the city, in order that the above-mentioned thousand select men-at-arms may run without delay, and make haste to go to the dwelling of the said Gonfaloniere, and that the Gonfaloniere may go with that armed force, and with the *Gonfalone de la\* Giustizia*, to the house or palace of Messer la Podestà: and then let Messer la Podestà send, and he is held and bound to send, putting aside all excuse and delay, one or more of the judges or cavaliers,† with such of his officers as he may think fit, together with the said Gonfaloniere and the said armed men, with the strong hand and with force, to the houses and possessions of such noble as shall have committed or caused to be committed any such injury as those hereinbefore mentioned; and shall destroy and lay waste, or cause to be wholly destroyed and laid waste, such houses and possessions as may be in the city, suburbs, or townships of Florence, utterly from the foundations and from the roots of them, before quitting the spot where such houses and goods are situated."

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The above passage will suffice to give the reader a fair notion of the spirit and scope of these celebrated "*Ordini di Giustizia*;" but a few other of their characteristic provisions may be more briefly cited.

"If *popolani*" meddle in the quarrels of the nobles, the consequences will not come under the provisions of this code, but will be subject to the ordinary jurisdiction of the tribunals.

\* *Sic.* The old Latin form was not yet quite abandoned.

† The word is not here used as before to mean nobles, but a title of civic rank.



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Nor shall any provision of this code be applicable to the case of any groom, footman, or maid, beaten by their master or mistress.

In all cases of injuries done by a noble against a man of the people, the oath of the injured man if he be living, or of his son or other representative if he be dead, confirmed by the testimony of three witnesses to the fact of the public belief in the guilt of the accused, shall be held to be sufficient proof.

Fines are enacted against any "*popolano*" who shall receive injury from a noble and not inform against him, and against the representatives of one slain who shall neglect to do so.

\* No noble shall be present at the council-board of the Captain of the People, or shall approach the council-hall when the Captain has taken his seat, unless he shall have been specially summoned to do so.

In cases of any disturbance or tumult in the city, no "*popolano*" shall enter or be in any house belonging to a noble.

No noble shall be a member of any council of the Captain of the People, or of the rulers of the guilds.

Besides the before-mentioned thousand soldiers under the orders of the Gonfaloniere, two thousand others shall be raised and armed as a civic guard, consisting exclusively of "*popolani*."

Whenever the Gonfaloniere shall have cause to proceed to any part of the city for the execution of justice in the manner hereinbefore described, no noble shall approach the place where he shall be so engaged.

As regards the payment of fines, and forfeiture and destruction of property, the father of a condemned noble shall be liable for his son, the son for his father, the brother for his brother, being sons of the same father, the uncle for his nephew, the nephew for his uncle, the grandfather

on the father's side for the grandson, and the reverse. On this law it may be remarked, that it would not appear to anybody in Italy at that day, neither to the authors of it, nor to the sufferers by it, so harsh and unjust as it does to modern ideas. The principle of the solidarity of families and communities was, as has been already observed, admitted and universally felt to be reasonable, and acted on.

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No noble shall be permitted to carry arms in Florence, unless he shall have given bail for himself in the sum of five hundred lire.

Any man of the people who shall be guilty of treason against the Commonwealth, shall, besides incurring the pains and penalties enacted by the common law against such offence, be pronounced and be held to be noble, and his descendants shall thenceforward be considered nobles.

Any man of the people conspiring with or aiding any noble in the commission of any of the hereinbefore mentioned crimes, shall incur twofold the penalty awarded by the common law to such offence if committed without such conspiracy or companionship,

No noble shall in any case enter the Palazzo of the Commonwealth, under pain of a fine of one hundred lire.

Besides all this, the principle of secret accusation was established. Boxes for the reception of such anonymous denunciations were affixed to the official residences of the Gonfalonere and the Capitano del Popolo, which were called *tamburi*,\* and a person thus accused was said to be *tamburato*.

These "*Ordini di Giustizia*," including various supplementary provisions added at different times between the first enactment of them by Giano della Bella in 1293 and 1306, are comprised in no less than a hundred and fifteen chapters. But the more salient passages of them which

\* Literally "drums."

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It will be remembered that the men thus utterly disfranchised and placed at the mercy of another caste, which avowedly hated them, were the owners of the greater part of the real property of the country to be governed; that no notion of the duty and policy of moderation in the dealings of a majority in the ascendant with a subject minority restrained the tendency of the age and people to tyrannise over and crush an adverse faction; and that the class thus subjected to disabilities, and to all the galling injustice of the grossest class legislation, was one long accustomed to look down on those who were now playing the tyrant, and wont to have, to use, and to appeal to arms. And when all this is borne in mind, it will hardly be anticipated by any that such legislation should lead to that orderly and tranquil condition of legality and prosperous social life which its authors expected from it.

As might have been expected, too, from the spirit of this code, its provisions, stringent as they are, were not sufficiently so to satisfy the animosity of the popular party. The first execution which took place under the new laws is a specimen of the animus with which they were worked. The son of a merchant named Benivieni had been killed in a quarrel by one of the noble family of Galigai in France. "And I, Dino Compagni," writes that historian,\* "happening to be Gonfaloniere di Giustizia in 1293, proceeded to their houses and to those of their family connexions,† and caused them to be destroyed according to the law."

\* Book i. p. 11, ed. cit.

† "*Consorti*." A "*consorteria*," a term constantly met with in the Italian historians, was a collective term, signifying all the collateral branches of a great family, as well as those connected with them by marriage, so that one "*consorteria*" often included more than one family name.



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Now, as this execution took place in the same year in which the new law was promulgated, and as the crime which caused it was committed in France, it is nearly certain that the law in this case was made to bear on a fact which occurred previous to its enactment. It may also be safely assumed that the Florentine magistrates could have had no such evidence of the deed and the circumstances attending it, as could justify them in condemning the accused.

A great outcry was raised by the nobles, of course; and Dino Compagni, a strong supporter of the new order of things, as has been seen, puts into the mouth of the nobles, when he is describing their discontented complaints, which he in no wise represents as unjust, but which seem to show that a severity even beyond the law was meted out to them, such remonstrances as these,—“A horse is galloping and swishes the face of a ‘*popolano*’ with his tail; or in a crowd one pushes against a man without any evil intention,—are our houses to be destroyed for such trifling matters as these?” \* And again further on, a noble—the same Berti Frescobaldi whose insult to Giano della Bella had more than any other circumstance led to the “*Ordini di Giustizia*,”—is represented as saying at a meeting of his class, “The dogs of the people have taken away from us all the honours and the offices of the state; we dare not even enter into the public palace; we have no means of causing our grievances to be heard; if we beat one of our own footmen our houses are destroyed! My counsel therefore, gentlemen, is that we free ourselves from this slavery. Let us seize our arms and rush to the Piazza, and kill every man of the people we can find, be he friend or foe, to the end that neither we nor our sons be held in subjection by them!” †

Wiser heads, however, in that council recommended a policy of treachery and cunning, by which it was hoped to induce the people to undo all that had been done, by per-

\* Dino Compagni, *loc. cit.*

† Dino Compagni, book i. p. 14.

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suading them that there was danger of a movement on the part of the Ghibellines; and at least to raise such suspicions and jealousies as should afford the means of ruining Giano della Bella.

But it is remarkable that Dino Compagni does not utter a word to the effect that the complaints of the nobles were unfounded. And yet Messer Frescobaldi complains that a noble dare not beat his own footman for fear of having his palace destroyed; whereas it will be remembered that that valuable privilege was by express enactment preserved to the nobles. The conclusion therefore would seem to be, that the laws were unduly strained to gratify the popular hatred.

But the certainty that such laws could not lead to tranquillity and prosperity, was the smallest part of the evil discernible in them. The real misfortune was, that the Florentines should have formed such conceptions of the nature of liberty, and of the best means of preserving it. It could not be otherwise than that a community attempting the arduous feat of self-government on such principles, should be moving on towards a final and fatal catastrophe. It is not wonderful, indeed, that the citizens of Florence in the thirteenth century, leading the forlorn hope in the great onward march of humanity, attempting to solve that great and crowning problem of self-government which the foremost nations of mankind are, after six hundred years of experience of efforts and of failures, but now beginning to understand and accomplish,—it is not wonderful that those pioneers of civilization should have failed in their noble enterprise. Far more is it surprising and admirable that they should have accomplished all that they did. But it is very important that their descendants should understand what were the errors which ensured their failure; and the urgent need that they should read the lesson of their past aright, is all the greater in that an observer of

the national character at the present day, will be struck by evidences of the same idiosyncrasy still existing in the race, which caused some of their early errors. There is still that tendency to under-rate the value of a principle, and to proportionably over-rate the importance of any single and immediate object. It was good and desirable that the overbearing tyranny of the nobles should be restrained, and the people protected from their violence. But the mischief inevitably arising from the disregard of the immutable principles of equal justice and equal rights, was far greater than the utmost good to be obtained by succeeding in the immediate object in hand. It is the perfect conviction that this is and ever must be so, that can alone inspire and keep alive in the public mind that supreme reverence for legality which is absolutely and indispensably necessary to a community capable of attempting to good purpose the high emprise of free self-government.

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The number of families disfranchised and declared incapable of ever holding any office in Florence was seventy-two. The names of them all, with the quarters of the city to which each belonged, have been preserved by an historian of a later date ; \* and many of them are still familiar and well-known names in the streets of Florence to the present day. And when it is remembered that each of these represents, not a family in our usual more restricted sense of the term, but an entire clan, it will be understood that such a proscription was not likely to be quietly submitted to. A series of conspiracies, treacheries, violences, and riots were the firstfruits of the new code ; and one of the first victims of these disturbances was, as has happened so frequently in similar cases, the great reformer Giano della Bella himself. Nor were the nobles the immediate authors of his fall, though it is true that

\* Cambi, his history is printed in vols. xx.—xxiii. of the *Delizie degli Eruditi Toscani*, vol. xx. p. 14.



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they had been sedulously at work to inflame the popular mind against him. There happened a quarrel between two nobles, of whom our old Campaldino acquaintance, Corso Donati, was one. Blood was shed; the matter came before the Podestà, who without any intention to act unjustly, as it would seem, but purposely deceived by the judge to whom the management of the case had been entrusted, decided, contrary to the evidence and to the justice of the case, in favour of Messer Corso, who was a specially unpopular man in the city. A popular insurrection was the result, in which the Podestà and his wife with difficulty escaped with their lives, and much violence was committed. While the tumult was at its height, Giano, who happened to be at the Palazzo with the *Priori*, thinking that his influence would suffice to quiet the rioters, went out among them to save the life of the Podestà, whom they were bent on murdering. So far, however, was he from having any influence over them, that he was obliged to return precipitately to the shelter of the palace to save his own life. And the next day the popular feeling, secretly stimulated by the nobles, ran so strongly against him, that he thought it prudent to leave the city. And no sooner was his back turned, than, in obedience to the intrigues of the nobles and the clamour of the “popolani grassi,” he was formally exiled; and the great reformer sought an asylum in France, where he eventually died.\*

One of the facts that generally seem most surprising to a modern reader of the histories of the mediæval Italian Commonwealths, is the contemporaneous existence of political disturbance and great social prosperity. After

\* Dino Compagni, book i. p. 15. Ammirato represents these events differently. According to him the “*minuto popolo*” was in favour of Giano; but I have followed the contemporary writer’s version of the story. Villani, book viii. chap. viii., may be compared; and Coppo Stefani, book iii. rub. cciv.

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reading the story of years, the main events of which seem to have been warfare and violence of all sorts in the streets, the internecine hostilities and proscriptions of civic factions, and the destruction of life and property, he is astonished to find the same period described as one in which the city was prosperous and happy, art and literature flourished and wealth increased. To our notions the two statements seem incompatible. And as the phenomenon is often met with, we are driven to the consideration of certain circumstances of general difference between those ages and our own, to find a theory on which such statements may become intelligible. And the first and most widely influential of those circumstances will be found, I think, in the incalculably increased rapidity and continuity of communication between country and country, city and city, class and class, and man and man, which characterizes modern society. The first consequence of this is a sensitiveness throughout the whole of human society to all that affects any part of it. This sensitiveness has increased in regular proportion to the increase in communication between individuals and bodies of mankind, until in our days it has come to pass that a popular riot at Naples shall cause fears of consequences and loss of cash on the exchange of London ; and, as Carlyle well says somewhere, that no Indian can quarrel with his squaw on Lake Winipeg without affecting all Europe by the tendency of that event to raise the price of furs. This is the perfection of that sensitiveness resulting from the perfection of intercommunication. In the phenomena of the mediæval societies we have the results of the opposite extreme\* condition. It is difficult to us to realise an idea of the distance, and the consequences of distance, which separated not only city from city, and street from street, but class

\* Not absolutely of the *extreme* condition, for this would have to be sought in the phenomena of the lowest form of savage life.

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from class, and interest from interest. And this separation made it possible for different conditions of things to exist side by side in the same city to a degree incomprehensible to our notions. The highly organized fabric of our society and our commerce is more easily injured than were the simpler and ruder organizations of the ages in question. A worm may be cut in half and continue to live not much the worse for the accident; whereas a much lesser injury suffices to kill a man. Panic is a modern malady to which modern commerce is subject, in consequence of the habit of experienced calculation of probable consequences resulting from universal intercommunication. The thirteenth-century merchants of Florence knew little of panics. If a noble was beggared, he was certainly lost as a customer for cloth. But that simple loss was the extent of the mischief. No general paralysis of trade was occasioned; and while fighting and the destruction of houses was going on in one street, the ordinary business of life was being transacted as usual in the next.

A second difference exercising a similar influence, was the greater boldness, as well as the less sensitiveness, of the mediæval commerce. It was not only unaffected by risks and dangers which it could neither see nor understand, but it was more audacious in braving those which it did see. It was accustomed to exist and transact its business amid the din of arms, and the chances of violence. And it could afford to brave the risks arising from such a state of things, because its profits were large. All mediæval commerce, including that of money and banking, was based on a system of enormous profits and enormous risks. And besides this, the wealth of Florence at this period was mainly derived from its extensive foreign trade in woollen cloth; a commerce which, under the simple conditions of the commercial transactions of that time, would be little interfered with by merely local disturbances at home.



It is necessary to allow much weight to such and such-like considerations, if we would comprehend the statements of the historians as to the prosperity of Florence during these closing years of the thirteenth century. Their testimony, however, is decided and consentient. “Never had the city found itself,” says Ammirato,\* “in a more prosperous and happy condition than that which it now enjoyed in respect of population, of wealth, and of credit; inasmuch as the number of citizens fit to bear arms exceeded thirty thousand; and that of those belonging to the territory was above seventy thousand. Not only was there no city in Tuscany which could give umbrage to Florence; but the power of Pisa having been greatly diminished, and the name of the Ghibelline faction almost extinguished, that republic, as well as all the other communes, had come to be obedient to Florence, either as subjects or as friends. In consequence of the leisure resulting from this tranquillity, literature was then in a very flourishing condition; so that that age produced many men of high excellence; and art began to arise at the same time, having been, as it were, dragged forth from its lurking-place amid the dimmest darkness. The reputation of the Florentine merchants, based on their deserved character for industry and integrity, stood exceedingly high, not only throughout Italy, but in every country of the world. And the citizens, following the example of the Commonwealth, were rivalling each other in the construction of magnificent buildings and palaces.”

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Machiavelli records the remarkable prosperity of that time in very similar terms, adding, that “if that tranquillity had not been disturbed by new dissensions within the walls, it could have had no cause to fear disturbance from without. For the city was in such a position, that it was not afraid either of the Imperial power, nor of its own

\* Lib. iv. ad an. 1299.

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1299. exiles ; and was well able to hold its own against all the states of Italy by its own strength. That mischief, however, which no power from without could have accomplished, was worked by those within the gates.”\*

We have, moreover, if further evidence of the correctness of those statements were needed, the incontrovertible testimony of those great works in every department of human effort, of which the first-cited historian speaks, and which have formed the imperishable glory of Florence in every succeeding age.

Then was planned and commenced that grandest of the symbols of the mediæval communal power and greatness, the “*Palazzo del Comune*,” which still, after five centuries and a half, excites the admiration of the civilized world. Then were commenced the magnificent churches of Santa Maria Novella, Santa Croce, and Santa Spirito. During the same years the commune, despite the large sums voted for these works, found the means to proceed with and complete the extremely costly undertaking of the new walls, which though decided on and commenced in 1285, had never been carried on. A decree made in 1299 is still extant, annulling the wills of those who bequeath nothing in aid of this great national object.

Above all, it was during those same prolific years that the citizens of Florence conceived the worthy ambition so memorably expressed in the decree of the commune, which orders the creation of that world-wonder the Cathedral of Florence. “Santa Reparata,” it was originally called, but afterwards and to the present day “Santa Maria del Fiore.” After setting forth the desire of the Commonwealth that the material works undertaken by it should correspond in grandeur of design to the loftiness of its ambition, the instrument directs “Arnolfo, master architect of our Commune, to make a model or design for the renovation of

\* Machiavelli, *Istorie Fiorent.* book ii. ad an. 1295.

Santa Reparata, of such noble and extreme magnificence, that the industry and skill of man shall be able to invent nothing grander or more beautiful," since, the document goes on to say, it had been decided in council, that no plan should be accepted, "unless the conception was such as to render the work worthy of an ambition, which had become very great, inasmuch as it resulted from the combined desires of a great number of citizens united in one sole will."\*

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In the more recently revived sister art, Cimabue was astonishing and delighting the eyes of his fellow-citizens by an approach to correctness of design, and a brilliancy of colour up to that time unknown and unimagined; and Giotto was already beginning to lead the age to demand a yet higher excellence.

Literature was still more generally and more successfully cultivated. Villani was writing his history, with a purity of style and diction which, taken in conjunction with the terser and less lucid, but still correct and very nervous style of Dino Compagni, and some other prose writers, who already preferred the use of the vulgar tongue to the Latin, rapidly disappearing from the uses of common life, goes far to show that the century ranging from 1275 to 1375 may be more justly held to be the Augustan age of Italian literature, than that more showy sixteenth century, which to the north of the Alps is very generally considered such. Especially the text of those remarkable documents, which have been cited, the *Ordini della Giustizia* and the statutes of the *Arte di Calimara*, show that the great poet for all time, who was then writing his "*Vita Nuova*," and building up his wondrous drama of the unseen world,

\* Richa, Notizie Storiche delle Chiese Fiorentine. Firenze, 1757, vol. vi. p. 14. We learn from Coppo Stefani, that to meet the expense of the works thus ordered, a poll tax of two soldi annually, and an income tax of twelve thirds per cent. were imposed, book iii. rubr. ccv. Such was the Tuscan financial phraseology. The impost was reckoned by "thirds."



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1299. cannot claim so entirely as has been attributed to him the comparatively subaltern merit of being the forger and fashioner of the sweet Tuscan speech. His friend, the melancholy and solitude-loving Guido Cavalcanti, was meditating verse as he walked lonely amid the clang of arms and the confusion of party broils in the streets of Florence. And it is a curious manifestation of the social life of that day, and of the impossibility of taking standing ground outside the fiery circle of its animosities and feuds, or remaining aloof from the whirl of its passions, to find this philosophising and morbidly-sensitive poet-natured man irritated one day in the streets of Florence into suddenly riding full tilt at the throat of his enemy, Corso Donati, the head of the faction opposed to his own.

Nevertheless that stormy time was a good and wholesome time. However much opposed to the notions formed from our own orderly, peace-loving habits, we cannot refuse to accept the concurrent testimony of all the witnesses that it was so. The fervid and exuberant vitality, that threw off the plethora of its force in the boils and blains of civic discord, produced also the better fruits of health, and an intense activity of all the social forces. The troubled current which allowed no life to stagnate, "*curis acuens mortalia corda*," was more favourable to genius and the products of it, than the slothful ease of calmer times.

Nor does the prosperity of Florence, and the high position which she had won for herself among the nations of Europe at the close of the thirteenth and beginning of the fourteenth century, after just two hundred years of independent existence, rest only on the testimony of native writers, or even on the more undeniable evidence of the works in every kind which those turbulent burghers have left behind them for the admiration and instruction of all subsequent generations. The estimation in which Florence and her citizens were held throughout contemporary

Europe is most curiously and strikingly shown by a very remarkable fact which has been recorded by the pencil \* A.D.  
1300. as well as the pen.

On the occasion of the Jubilee instituted for the first time by Boniface VIII. in 1300, when all the princes of Europe sent ambassadors to the Pope, no less than twelve of those so sent were Florentines. The fact is so remarkable that it is worth while to give their names and those of the powers they represented. There were—

1. Messer Ugolino da Vicchio, for the King of England.
2. M. Musciatto Franzesi, for the King of France.
3. M. Ranieri Lanzeri, for the King of Bohemia.
4. M. Vermiglio Alfani, for the King of Germany.
5. M. Simone Rossi, for the ruler of Russia.
6. M. Bernardo Ernari, for Scala, lord of Verona.
7. M. Guiscardo dei Bastari, for the Khan of Tartary.
8. M. Manno degli Adimari, for the King of Naples.
9. M. Guido Tabanca, for the King of Sicily.
10. M. Lapo degli Uberti, for Pisa.
11. M. Cino di Diotisalvi, for the lord of Camerino.
12. M. Bencivenni Folchi, for the Grand Master of the Knights of St. John.

Every one of these was a Florentine citizen; and the Florentine writers are justified in boasting that no similar fact can be produced from the annals of any other nation either before or since. Pope Boniface was greatly struck by the fact; and declared that it seemed to him that to the four old elements of the world a fifth must now be added,—the Florentines.†

\* A picture of the incident in question exists in the Palazzo Strozzi, and another by Ligozzi in the Palazzo Vecchio, an engraving from which forms the frontispiece to the *Ritratti d' Uomini Illustri Toscani*, four vols. fol. Firenze, 1766.

† See the “*Ritratti*” cited above, where the facts are given, with an indication of the MS. which originally recorded them.

## CHAPTER IV.

Feud of the *Bianchi e Neri*—Real motives of the quarrel—Origin of the names *Neri* and *Bianchi*—Chiefs of parties brought from Pistoia to Florence—The Cerchi family—Vieri de' Cerchi—Constituent parts of the *Bianchi* party—Guelphism in Florence—Dante a member of the *Bianchi*—Corso Donati—*Popolani grassi*—*Popolo minuto*—Professions of the *Neri*—Private enmity between Vieri de' Cerchi and Corso Donati—Causes of jealousy—The two parties break out into open quarrel—Scene at a funeral—Scene in the Piazza Trinità—Outrage by Simone Donati—*Neri* make application to the Pope to interfere in Florence—Partisanship of Pope Boniface—His bankers, the Spini family—Nero Cambi—Vieri de' Cerchi summoned to Rome—The Pope sends Cardinal Acquasparta to Florence—Riot on the eve of St. John's-day—Chiefs of both parties banished: *Neri* to Città della Pieve: *Bianchi* to Sarzana—Popular feeling strong against Cardinal Acquasparta—He leaves Florence, pronouncing the interdict against the city—The *Bianchi* return from Sarzana—Death of Guido Cavalcanti—*Neri* send again to Pope Boniface—Dino Compagni—Dante goes on a mission to Rome—Corso Donati also goes to Rome—They plead against each other before the Pope—Boniface invites Charles of Valois into Italy—He arrives near Rome, in September, 1301.

So great was the prosperity, power, and reputation of the Commonwealth, that, as Machiavelli has told us, no danger could have threatened it, save from within. But internal discord had been a chronic evil in Florence. Prosperity had grown up by the side of, and in spite of it. And the new party feuds, which mark the opening of the new century, were not in themselves more dangerous to the public weal than the old feuds had been, and would have produced no deeper-seated mischief than they had done, had they not led to the far more dangerous evil of inviting the interference of foreign potentates. Already the greatest



dangers to the Commonwealth had arisen from the same source, and had been escaped rather by the good fortune than the good conduct of the citizens. But the lesson had not profited them, for party hatred was a stronger passion than patriotism; and though the fourteenth-century Florentines loved Florence much, they hated their fellow-citizens of an opposite faction more.

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The fourteenth century opened in Florence on a new scene of partisan strife, with new actors, new names, new party cries, and a fresh distribution of the various classes of society among the adverse factions. The curtain rises on the new drama of "*I Bianchi e i Neri*"—the White and the Black party. But inasmuch as habits of thought and of tongue do not become suddenly obsolete, as party watchwords and names remain long after the real things first signified by them have vanished into the past, and as mankind will not so live that their history can be written with that consistency, entireness, and accuracy which would make the writing of it more easy and satisfactory, we find the old party designations still extant, and constantly in their wrong places, associated with social elements with which we should not have expected to see them mixed, and thus producing a degree of confusion which renders the period of the *Bianchi e Neri* feud the most difficult to understand of any part of Florentine history.

The true key to the right conception of it will, however, be found in remembering that the real quarrel is from century to century the same, whatever may be the names attached to the leading combatants. As usual we are told that this new Bianchi and Neri feud arose from one, or from one or two small incidents, which are carefully recorded by historians from age to age. And doubtless these things happened, and gave rise to *the names* of the factions said to have arisen from them. But whether the rallying cry in vogue be Guelph and Ghibelline, or Bianchi

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and Neri, the real gist of the contest is between the encroachment of the popular element and the attempted repression of it by the classes above it. Not that the Bianchi and the Neri partisans cut each other's throats because one was a poor man and wanted to rise, and the other a rich man and wanted to keep him down. For men hate each other more bitterly for words and names than for things. The Neri hated the Bianchi because they *were* Bianchi; and *vice versâ*. But at bottom the real ground of contest, the real interests which caused a personal quarrel between two branches of a powerful family to be adopted by the masses of the body politic, the sympathies, opinions, and feelings, which led one man to be a *Bianco*, and another a *Nero*, turned, in truth, upon the great social question which has been stated.

The original feud between the Bianchi and Neri, which gave its name to the great social contest in Florence, was imported into that city from Pistoia. Among all the turbulent, violent, and bloodstained municipal communities of mediæval Italy, Pistoia had the reputation of being the most turbulent, the most violent, and the most bloodstained. For some time back the most prominent, wealthy, and powerful family in that faction-torn little city had been that of the Cancellieri, which, on the occasion of a family quarrel, and, as Villani says, "from over-fatness and inspiration of the devil," had become divided into two great septs, sprung one from the first, and the other from the second wife of the same common ancestor. And as it chanced that one of these ladies had been called Bianca her descendants took that distinctive appellation, and the other branch of the family called themselves by the name most naturally opposed to it. Every offence committed by any member of either branch against one of the other gave rise to a retaliation of increased gravity, to be followed in due course by a yet more violent revenge; till at last the

city became a mere fighting-ground for the lawless bravoës of these noble ruffians, and civil life became well-nigh impossible there. Under these circumstances, Florence, in the year 1300, with the consent of the Commune of Pistoia took into its own hands the government of the city; and with a view of putting an end to the strife, commanded the chiefs of either faction to come and live in Florence.\*

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A more unwise and improvident step could hardly have been devised. The great and singularly numerous† family of the Cancellieri had intermarried with Florentines, and had numerous friendships and alliances in Florence. And, as if to make the result which ensued still more inevitable, the Cancellieri Bianchi were consigned to the hospitality of their friends and connections the Cerchi, and the Neri to that of their relatives the Frescobaldi. The consequence that of course immediately followed was that, instead of civil war being extinguished in Pistoia, Florence was inoculated with the virus, which with wonderful rapidity spread itself through the entire body of a social system so thoroughly disposed to receive it.

There was probably no period during the centuries under consideration at which Florence would not have been perfectly ready to divide itself and take sides in so pretty a quarrel as that now presented to its notice. But the moment in question seems to have been specially well chosen for setting the whole city in a sudden blaze of civil war.

There were then in Florence two heads of great families,

\* Villani, book viii. chap. xxxviii. ; Coppo Stefani, book iv. rubr. cexvii. ; Machiavelli, book ii. ad an. 1300 ; Ammirato, book iv. ad an. Gonf. 44. Henceforward citations from Ammirato are made to the Gonfalonieri, who are noted in numeric order from the establishment of that office in the margin of the best editions.

† There were at that time one hundred and seven men belonging to the family, Coppo Stefani, *loc. cit.*



A.D. 1300. who by every circumstance of position, personal character, and connections seemed cut out for enemies and leaders of opposite factions. We have met with them both before, fighting on the same side on the field of Campaldino. One of these was Vieri de' Cerchi, who, on that occasion, led the band of "*feditori*," and the other Corso Donati, who commanded the reserve, and who as, at that time, Podestà of Pistoia, had already had an opportunity of acquiring a bias on one or the other side of the Cancellieri quarrels. The Cerchi were merchants and "*popolani*;" the Donati nobles.

Vieri, the head of the Cerchi family, was a trader to the back-bone; cautious, narrowly prudent, unambitious, unpolished in his manners, averse from putting himself in a position of risk and responsibility. Not that he was physically a coward. His conduct at Campaldino is abundantly sufficient testimony to the reverse. But of moral cowardice it seems impossible to acquit him. His race were like him. They were all popular in Florence, both with high and low. Extremely wealthy, they were liberal, kind to all, ready to do a service; frank, open-hearted, open-handed, easy men; all the race of them remarkably handsome, though heavy and lymphatic in temperament. But they were not gentlemen. They were, says Villani, essentially *nouveaux riches*; and the unpolished awkwardness of their manners is more than once alluded to both by him and by Dino Compagni. Messer Vieri himself was specially noted as deficient in the gentleman's accomplishment of an easy and graceful delivery. Though by no means wanting in sense, he was no speaker.\*

Notwithstanding these disadvantages, however, their great wealth, real worth, good repute, numerous alliances

\* Villani, book viii. chap. xxxix.; Dino Compagni, book i. p. 20, ed. Fioren.

with families of high standing, and many friends, caused them to be one of the leading families of Florence, and in so causing them, placed them—in the difficult times which were coming upon the city—in an essentially false position.

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The account which is given by the historians of the various elements which made up the body of the Cerchi adherents, and placed Messer Vieri in the position of chief of the Bianchi faction, will show how entirely the landmark of the old parties had been removed, and the previous divisions of society broken up.

In the first place, the remnant of the old Ghibellines were all among the Cerchi adherents,—the proud old Tory gentlemen followers of the upstart rich citizen! Times were changed with these reduced and diminished descendants of the haughty old races, so often decimated, exiled, and proscribed. They had been long swimming hard against the current of the times; and the inevitable result was that most of them had ended by sinking beneath the waters, and the rest had been thrown on the shore exhausted, and incapable of further exertion. In fact Ghibellinism was extinct in Florence. The name remained, and was occasionally put to use by the new parties in their struggles; but the thing had ceased to exist. The old word will meet the reader of the Florentine historians for many a year yet. For names in such cases always long outlive the things they were first used to designate; and such names, as the experience of every political community shows, are apt to be unduly evoked from the graves in which they ought to lie, and made to walk the earth like other ghosts, as bugbears for the frightening of those who do not know the nothingness of them.

All the political world in Florence was now Guelph, as a matter of course,—as all the English world was Hano-

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verian in the latter half of the last century. They did not talk or think much about being Guelphs, except when some political capital was to be made by raising the cry of Ghibellinism against an opponent. They talked and thought more of newer and more really living party divisions. And the remnant of the representatives of the old Ghibelline families attached themselves to the Guelph Bianchi, under Vieri de' Cerchi, rather than to the equally Guelph Neri under Corso Donati, partly because the Cerchi had never been noted as persecutors of the fallen party in the old times; partly because these high-born gentlemen were almost all very poor, and Messer Vieri had a very large purse and a liberal hand; partly because his kindly, though under-bred manners and character, and his frank avowed *bourgeoisie* grated less harshly against the susceptibilities of their pride, than the arrogant haughtiness of their fellow noble and hereditary political foe, Donati.

In the next place, the masses of the populace, the "*popolo minuto*," were all with the Cerchi and the White party; and this, because Messer Vieri and his family had been strongly opposed to the ingratitude with which Giano della Bella had been treated, and to his exile. And the "*popolo minuto*" had long since discovered how great a mistake they had made in allowing themselves to be seduced into becoming the momentary accomplices in that injustice.

Lastly, many powerful families and men of mark ranged themselves on the "White" side, from purely personal reasons. Berto Frescobaldi, though the rest of the family were all on the other side, and were the hosts of the Cancellieri Neri, when they arrived in Florence, was among the adherents of Messer Vieri, because he was heavily in debt to him. Messer Goccia Adimari, because he had quarrelled with his own family; others, because they were



connected with the Cerchi in commerce; and many others for various such motives swelled the faction of the Bianchi.\* A.D.  
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Besides all these classes of adherents, which together assured to the Bianchi the decided preponderance in the city, one man may be named,—of course, without intending to exclude all others from the same category;—who belonged to that party, passionately and with intense exclusiveness (for that was the nature of the man), from motives of large political expediency and far-sighted patriotism. This was Dante Alighieri.

Such was the party of the Bianchi. And the reader will observe, that little as it was homogeneous, and incapable as were the great majority of its members and its leaders of appreciating justly their position, or so shaping the destinies of the country as to forward it on a path of durable prosperity; yet this party, including the progressive elements of society, was more in accordance with the spirit of the time than its adversary; and would have inherited the future, if there had been sufficient wisdom in its ranks to render possible any future worthy of the inheritance of a free people.

In strong contrast to the constitution of this party was that of the Neri. Its leader was Messer Corso Donati, a noble of Guelphic race, who is thus described by Dino Compagni;—an historian, it is fair to add, who was a violent partisan of the opposite faction:—

“He was a cavalier,” says Dino,† “much resembling Catiline the Roman, but more cruel than he. He was of noble race, handsome in person, a good speaker, of elegant manners, and of a subtle intelligence, allied to a heart always intent on evil. To such ends he got together a numerous band of hirelings, and went with a great

\* Dino Compagni, book i. p. 22.

† Book ii. p. 43.

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following. He committed many deeds of arson and robbery in the city, and did much mischief to the Cerchi and their friends. In this way he amassed considerable sums, and became very powerful. Such was Messer Corso Donati, who from his arrogance was nicknamed the Baron; so that as he rode through the city, the people would cry, 'Hurrah for the Baron!' He behaved as if the city were his own. Vainglory was his pole-star, and led him to engage in many great affairs."

This is the account of an enemy. But there is sufficient evidence to assure us, that the chief of the Neri was an extremely haughty overbearing man, tyrannical in his disposition, lawless in his conduct, and corruptly self-seeking in his politics. Those who adhered to him and mainly composed the Neri party were the class, largely increased during the late years of material and commercial prosperity, of the "*popolani grassi*,"—the rich citizen families; men, who having belonged to the progressive party in the old noble-ridden days, before they became "*grassi*," were now of opinion that progress had gone far enough,—that things were well as they were, and that there was no knowing what the world would come to, if all those thin outside ones, the "*popolo minuto*," wanted to become fat also.

Most of the nobles of the old Guelph families, the men who had been the quickest among their class to see which way the wind was blowing, had two, three, or more generations ago attached themselves to the popular party, and had formed intimacies and intermarriages with the uppermost strata of the fat commonalty. The Neri, in short, were essentially a Whig party, with oligarchical feelings, and a tendency to monopolize and secure the good things of place and power to the members of a restricted number of powerful families. They made loud professions of being pure old Whigs—only using, of course, the word

Guelphs in the place of the English party name,—and strove to make capital of the element of effete Ghibellinism, which was to be found in the ranks of the opposite party. Whenever an attempt was to be made to excite the masses against their opponents, a cry of “Ghibellinism!” was raised. And it was true that, though Ghibellinism was dead in Florence, it was not so entirely extinct in some of the other municipalities of Tuscany. The favourite accusation, therefore, against the Bianchi was, that they were entering into relations with the Ghibellines of foreign States, with the view to the resuscitation of the party in Florence. There is, however, no evidence whatever to be found of the truth of these charges; and Dino Compagni expressly declares that they were wholly destitute of foundation.

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It will be seen at once from this account of the component elements of the two parties that the original Pistoia quarrels of the two branches of the Cancellieri had nothing whatever to do with the principles of the great feud which divided Florence, and exercised an influence on the politics of every part of Italy, beyond giving to the two factions their names; and that the adoption of these by either side was settled by the mere accident of the one branch of the family having been connected by marriage with the Cerchi, and the other by friendship with the Frescobaldi.

There were, however, motives of private enmity between the Cerchi and the Donati; but these were rather consequences than causes of the great party feud. All Florence did not range itself suddenly into two hostile camps from sympathy with the petty bickerings of two men. The real motives to dissension are to be seen in the composition of the parties. Circumstances made those two individuals the chieftains of their respective factions; and that position led to the acts of hostility and offence which some writers put forward as the causes of the



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all-absorbing political divisions which fill the history of the ensuing years.

Several stories of these mutual jealousies and wrongs and retaliations have been recorded by the chroniclers of the period, as if they were so many causes of the events that followed. But in truth, if worth preserving, it is only as illustrations of the life of that time.

They were near neighbours unfortunately, these two curiously contrasted partisan chieftains. The Cerchi had bought a fine old palace that had belonged to the great Ghibelline family of the Guidi, close to the less magnificent dwelling of the Donati, who were far from wealthy; and there the rich upstart family spent the large profits of their prosperous trade in building and improving, and keeping many horses and servants, and living in great style. They had a taste for splendour too in their personal habiliments, those young Cerchi, with their handsome, large-limbed, gawky bodies, good-natured plebeian faces, and awkward bearing. And all these things were gall and wormwood to the poor proud nobles, who felt themselves extinguished by all this splendour close by the side of them. Then again, that no element of hatred might be wanting between the two families, there was a distant connection by marriage between them. For needy Messer Corso, after the death of his first wife, had married, against the will of all her family, an heiress who was a connection of the Cerchi family. And then there was litigation and an attempt to keep the lady's fortune from him, which, it may be supposed, did not improve "the Baron's" temper, though he succeeded in possessing himself of the property by the strong hand. "The Baron" had a caustic tongue too: and had ever some new insulting jest at the expense of his rich neighbour, whose habits and manners offered but too frequent occasions for attacks. And the jesters and buffoons who frequented great folks' houses were sure to carry

to Palazzo Cerchi a full, and often exaggerated, report of all that was said in such sort at Palazzo Donati. “The Baron” nicknamed also the respectable but unrhetorical Messer Vieri. He rarely spoke of him save as “the donkey of the ward !” And when the worthy man spoke in the council, would ask if the ward donkey had brayed that day ?

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Florentine party hatred, however, was not wont in those days to exhale itself in such little amenities as these ; and as the animosity between the families became from day to day more exasperated, the manifestations of it soon began to assume a darker dye. Upon one occasion it happened that two young men of the Cerchi, having been imprisoned by the Podestà for some trifling matter, an infamous crime, which resulted in the death by poison of some other persons, as well as of the two young Cerchi, was strongly suspected to be the work of Messer Corso Donati.

Things soon came to such a pitch that it was almost impossible for the members of the two parties to meet in any way in the city without riot and fighting as the immediate result. Upon one occasion a very large number of the citizens were assembled at the funeral of a lady of the Frescobaldi family ; both the Cerchi and the Donati were there in considerable numbers: Now the usage at similar assemblies was, as Dino Compagni tells us,\* that those who were noble should sit on benches, while those who were not so sat on reed mats on the ground. And it so chanced that the two rival families were placed exactly opposite to each other,—the Donati in all the dignity of their privileged seats, and the plebeian Cerchi on the ground in front of them. The position was already sufficiently tempting to the insolence of the one party and irritating to the pride of the other. No doubt looks and

\* Book i. p. 19.

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gestures eloquent of insult and defiance passed between them; and when, presently, one of the Cerchi rose from his seat on the ground—perhaps only, as the *Bianco* historian suggests, for the purpose of arranging the folds of his dress under him as he sate,—the Donati, imagining, or pretending to imagine, that violence was intended, immediately clapped their hands to their swords, and rose to their feet also. The movement was more than enough to make the smouldering passions burst into flame. It could hardly be expected that the Cerchi would remain sitting on the ground at the feet of their enemies standing over them with their swords in their hands. They also sprung to their feet, and the two parties rushed on each other, in the church, while the corpse on its low bier in front of the altar was yet awaiting the rites of sepulture. The solemnity of the place and the occasion caused the assembly to regard the unseemly struggle with more of disapprobation than such matters ordinarily excited; and a number of citizens rushed between the rioters and separated them. The parties returned to their several dwellings, leaving the dead to the empty church and the priests, either faction accompanied by a large number of the citizens. When the Cerchi and their friends reached the palace of that family, a powerful band of the younger men would have at once organised an attack upon the neighbouring house of the Donati; but the design was overruled by the greater prudence and moderation of old Messer Vieri.

Another affair of the same sort occurred at the beginning of May in that same year,\* and ended worse. The early days of May were, ever since the great victory of Campaldino, always devoted to festivities and amusements, in the manner described in a previous Chapter. It was at night in the Piazza di Santa Trinità on the 1st of May. A party

\* 1300.



of ladies were dancing\* on the Piazza, and a crowd of cavaliers and citizens were standing around and looking at them. Among the lookers on were a party of the Cerchi young men and their friends on horseback; when, as ill-luck would have it, a number of the Donati, who had been supping together, and had after supper mounted their horses to ride through the city and see what fun was going on, came up, and began pressing their horses forwards to get a sight of the ladies in the circle. In doing this they pushed against some of the Cerchi party. Then both sides began reining and spurring their horses so as to hustle the others. Of course but one result could follow. Out came the swords; the frightened women ran off, leaving their *al fresco* ball-room to become a battle-field, and a fierce fight ensued, in which one of the Cerchi had his nose cut off by the stroke of a sword. Had he been killed, the fact would have contributed less potently to exacerbate the hate and passionate desire for revenge, which such a permanent memento of wrong and outrage was calculated to keep alive.†

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Some months later, on the eve of Christmas-day in the same year, a large crowd of citizens were listening to a friar preaching on the Piazza in front of the church of Santa Croce; and Simone, son of Messer Corso Donati, was there piously listening to the exhortations adapted to that celebration of "peace on earth and good-will among men," when Messer Niccola de' Cerchi came riding by on his way to a villa a few miles from the city. It does not appear that the latter provoked, or even took any notice of

\* It may be observed that both Villani and Dino Compagni speak of "ladies dancing;" and say no word of men dancing with them. And when in another place Villani speaks of *couples* joining in such revels together, he seems to imply that promenading through the streets in pairs, to the sound of music perhaps, but not dancing, was the amusement in hand.

† Villani, book viii. chap. xxxix.; Dino Compagni, book i. p. 22.

A.D. 1300. the young Donati in any way. But the sight of one he hated, off his guard and unprotected, was a temptation too great to be withstood. So leaving the friar's sermon in the midst he rode after Messer Niccola, came up with him a little outside the city, and there murdered him. The dying man, however, as he fell gave Messer Simone a stab in the side with his dagger, from the effects of which the aggressor died in the course of the next day, very much regretted, says Villani, "for he was one of the most accomplished and virtuous\* young men in the city, and the hope and treasure of his father, Messer Corso."

Things in Florence being in the deplorable condition indicated by such incidents as the above, which are merely specimens of many others of like kind, the leaders of the old Guelph party determined on the step of applying to the Pope to mediate between the hostile factions and restore peace to the city. Such a step would hardly under any circumstances have been a wise one, involving, as it did, a dangerous admission of the incapability of the Florentine citizens to rule their own city. Nevertheless, looking to the theory of the Papal office, a really impartial mediation undertaken at the instance of both parties in the contest, might have been useful at least for the nonce, and for enabling the city to get over its immediate difficulties. But this application to Boniface VIII., and that Pope's acceptance of, and action on it, were, in no wise what he and his friends in Florence would have wished them to appear. The application to Rome was a mere party move, by which the Neri hoped to wrest from the hands of their opponents that preponderance in the city which the largeness of the Bianchi party, and the popular element in it assured to them. And the part which the Pope was to

\* Villani, book viii. chap. xlix., "il più compiuto e virtudioso donzello di Firenze." *Virtudioso* means "virtuous," not, as might perhaps be imagined, "valorous."

play in the matter had already been arranged behind the scenes with his Holiness. A.D.  
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The Papal bias would naturally be in favour of the party which specially put forward and stood upon its Guelphism. But the Neri had, besides this advantage, special means of approaching the papal ear, and influencing the papal mind.

The Spini family, who were leading members of the Neri oligarchy, were the Pope's bankers; for already the Florentines had begun to be known, not only throughout Italy, but beyond the Alps, as the principal money-dealers and money-lenders of Europe. Florentine bankers of subsequent generations found various later Popes terribly given to overdrawing their accounts; and the probability is, that the Spini books showed a permanent balance against their infallible customer. At all events their influence with his Holiness was great; and was exercised chiefly through the instrumentality of a humble agent, a mere clerk in the office of that member of the firm who lived at Rome, and managed that branch of the business of the house. This clerk—Nero Cambi—must have been a remarkable man. The son of a Florentine silver refiner, put into the great Spini house, and by them sent to Rome as clerk in their counting-house there,\* he, by sheer force of intellect, unaided even by pleasing address, for he was harsh and disagreeable in his manners, had acquired such an influence over the mind of the Pope, as to have led him to become strongly hostile to the party of the Bianchi in Florence.

When, accordingly, the application which has been mentioned, and which was probably all previously arranged and agreed upon before hand, was made to Pope Boniface, he began by summoning Messer Vieri to Rome, and

\* Dino Compagni, book i. p. 20.



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1300. exhorting him to reconcile himself with his enemies. The blunt old merchant, whose uncourtliness on the occasion is remarked on with disapprobation by all the historians, answered that he wished to have no enmities, and had therefore need of no reconciliations. At which reply his Holiness was much offended, and certainly no better inclined to the party of the Bianchi than he had been.

It was then determined that the Pope should send an envoy to Florence, to act as mediator between the parties. Villani says that the Neri sent to the Pope begging him to interfere. Dino Compagni represents the holy father as induced to do so by Messer Nero Cambi, the banker's clerk. In any case it is pretty clear that the measure was decided on in concert by the Pope and the party of the Neri. The man chosen for the embassy was the Cardinal Matteo d' Acquasparta, who accordingly arrived in Florence in the June of that same year, 1300, on the 15th of which month Dante entered office as one of the Priori.

Florence was, during those months, in a condition to make the task of ruling the city in no small degree an arduous and anxious one. And the Priori of those summer months, of whom Dante was one, were not long in office before they were called on to act, for the preservation of the city from anarchy, with an energy and boldness of patriotism that was too rarely manifested by the magistracy of the Commonwealth. On the eve of St. John's day, the representative bodies of the guilds, led by their Consuls, went in procession, according to yearly custom, to celebrate a solemn service in the church of the patron saint. It was a great day in Florence; and all the civic pomp of the municipal government was put in requisition to solemnise the occasion. All the citizens were in the streets to witness the show; the procession was winding its way with its huge wax lights, its banners, and its ecclesiastical and civic ceremonial, when suddenly an armed

party of nobles of the faction of the Neri fell upon them, throwing all into confusion, beating the magistrates of the guilds, and crying out, "We are the men who conquered at Campaldino! and are such as you to take from us the honours and dignities of the city?"

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It was impossible to pass over such an outrage as this, if any semblance of law and order was to be preserved in the city. And yet the Signory was reluctant to exasperate animosities, and to incur even the appearance of partiality by an act of severity against their political opponents. The measure adopted in this difficulty by the government, affords curious proof how readily the most enlightened and patriotic statesmen of the time sacrificed legality to expediency; how easily they lost sight of principles which the more matured experience of mankind has recognised as fundamental and indispensable; and how little they were aware that, in doing so, they were sapping the foundations of liberty and making self-government impossible.

The Neri were guilty. The Signory, composed of men of the opposite party, wished honestly and patriotically to be impartial; they feared to be just, lest they should draw upon themselves accusations of injustice; and so they determined on punishing both parties alike. The historian Dino Compagni was one of several citizens of note whom the Signory, of which Dante was one, called to assist them with their advice, when this measure was determined on; "and it was decided," he writes, "to banish \* a certain number of either party," whom he proceeds to name. Corso Donati, the chief of the Neri, appears on the list; but not so Vieri de' Cerchi, the corresponding man among the Bianchi. The former was a man likely enough to have been personally engaged in the outrage which had been committed. But it was out of the question to suppose

\* For a time, is to be understood, not for life.

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1300. that the cautious and respectable old merchant Messer Vieri could have anything to do with such proceedings. Città delle Pievi, a small town just beyond the modern frontier of Tuscany, in the direction of Rome, was named as the place of exile for the Neri; and Sarzana, also just beyond the recent frontier of Tuscany in the opposite direction, towards Genoa, as that assigned to the Bianchi.

The latter, who were unjustly condemned, obeyed at once, and left the city. The Neri resisted for awhile, but eventually yielded before the energetic attitude of the government. Had they not done so, says Dino Compagni; had they, on the contrary, openly rebelled at that moment, they would assuredly have succeeded in overthrowing the government, and producing a revolution which would have thrown the city entirely into their hands. For an arrangement had been made, with the connivance of the Cardinal Acquasparta, to bring up a strong body of Lucchese, and by their assistance overpower the authorities. Fortunately they hesitated till the moment at which the blow might have been successfully struck was passed. For the Signory, having discovered what was intended, took prompt and energetic measures to prevent the march of any such band from Lucca to Florence.

But, as Dino remarks,\* this incident completely tore the mask from the face of the Cardinal; and if there were any who before doubted as to the real nature of his errand in Florence, they could now doubt no longer. Professing to come in the character of peace-maker, and the impartial friend of both parties, he was really sent there as an accomplice and fellow-conspirator of the Neri, with the perfectly understood and pre-arranged purpose of revolutionizing the city in their favour.

The popular feeling on this occasion was so high in the

\* Book i. p. 21.



city, that strong demonstrations of hostility to the treacherous Cardinal took place ; and one foolish fellow committed the imprudence (says Dino) of shooting an arrow through the window of the apartment in the Bishop's palace in which Acquasparta was lodged. Of course his Eminence made a huge outcry, said he was in danger of his life in Florence, and went to lodge for greater safety in the palace of the Mozzi, on the other side of the Arno. The Signory waited on him there, with excuses and apologies for the affront which had been offered him, and with a present of thirteen hundred florins, of which they begged his acceptance, regretting the smallness of the sum, and explaining to his Eminence that it was not in their power to dispose of a larger amount without making it appear in the public accounts. "The Cardinal," says Dino, "looked very hard at the money, but declined it."

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Of course, after what had taken place, it was clear to the Cardinal that he had no chance of inducing the Signory to grant him those powers of regulating the offices and honours of the Commonwealth, in the hope of obtaining which he had come to Florence in the assumed character of peacemaker. So he returned in anger to Rome, leaving the city under interdict.

The Bianchi who had been exiled to Sarzana were soon allowed to return, in consequence of the deadly malaria prevailing there.\* Of course it would be said that this was due to the favouritism of a government of their own political colour. But the much-lamented death of Guido Cavalcanti, who was among the exiles, and who returned to Florence only to die of the malaria fever contracted at his place of banishment, was a sufficient proof that the Bianchi had endured at least their share of the evils of

\* Sarzana is perfectly healthy now. The circumstance in the text mentioned by the historians, is one of many indications that the reign of malaria in the Tuscan maremma has been greatly restricted in the course of ages.

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1300. exile, and that the motive assigned for their recall was no mere excuse.

But those of the Neri who had remained in Florence thought otherwise; and being stimulated to action by the return of their enemies, they called a secret party meeting in the Convent of Santa Trinità, in which it was determined to send messengers to Pope Boniface, with a view of inducing him to invite some powerful prince from beyond the Alps, by whose assistance a revolution might be brought about in Florence, with the effect of securing for the Neri oligarchy the government of the city. No blacker treason than this could it enter into the heart of a Florentine to conceive. No baser bartering of his birth-right of liberty for the miserable pottage-mess of place and power under the rule of a foreign tyrant could the citizen of a free Commonwealth be guilty of. No more short-sighted suicidal folly could an Italian fall into.

Dino Compagni did not at first think that any such treasonable resolution had been decided on at the meeting. But the assembly in itself was in contravention of the Ordini di Giustizia, and the more violent members of the Bianchi party were clamorous that the Signory should punish those who had been engaged in it. Messer Dino, therefore, anxious above all things as a good citizen and a patriot to heal the party feuds which were ruining the Commonwealth, and to calm down the passions on either side, took upon himself the office of mediator, and went to and fro between the Signory and the conspirators, receiving from the latter assurances that their meeting had been held with no evil purpose whatever, and persuading the former to abstain from taking any steps against them in the matter, and, as he says of himself, giving both parties an abundance of smooth words. But while he was thus engaged in striving to make peace, circumstances were discovered which conclusively proved the real nature and scope of the

meeting. And it is to be remarked that Villani, who A.D.  
1301. equally with Compagni was writing of what passed under his own observation, either never was the dupe of the professions of innocence which deceived his fellow-historian, or else speaks of what was subsequently known as if it had never been doubted. For he simply states, that at the meeting in the convent of Santa Trinità, it was decided to send messengers to the Pope, with the treasonable proposals above described.

Great was the disturbance and anger in the city when the truth of the matter was known; the Signory condemned the leaders of the Neri to heavy fines; and the attitude of the two parties towards each other became from day to day more hostile.

The Signory also sent an embassy on their own behalf to Pope Boniface, consisting of three citizens, of whom Dante was one. Of the other two, one was a weak easily-led man, who was of no use at all; and the other a mere creature of the Pope.\* Boniface received them in a private audience; protested that his only wish and intention was to pacify Florence, and assist in restoring her to tranquillity and prosperity; and bade two of the envoys return home and assure their government that such and no other were his intentions. The two who were thus dismissed were those above characterised, and the third, whom the Pope chose to retain at Rome, was Dante. But it is very remarkable that Dino Compagni, neither in speaking of the sending of the embassy, nor when he relates the dismissal of the two, and retention of the third,† by the Pope, mentions the name of Dante at all.

The messengers from the other party were received by Boniface in a very different spirit. And Corso Donati, "breaking his ban," which means illegally quitting the

\* Misserini, *Vita di Dante*, cap. xviii.

† Dino Compagni, book ii. p. 30.



A.D. 1301. place assigned to him as his residence during exile, went to Rome himself, to back their representations and requests. Considering the special relations between Pope Boniface and the Neri, which were well known to the Signoria, and the abundant proofs the government had already had of the Pope's wish to favour them at the expense of the Bianchi, it was injudicious to send the Neri into exile Rome-wards, and the Bianchi in the opposite direction. Prudence would have counselled an exactly opposite arrangement. But during the whole of this difficult and thorny period, and the troubles that followed, the Bianchi manifested throughout all that lack of statesmanship, prudence, and energy with which Dante so bitterly reproaches them.

In Rome the cause of Florence was now being pleaded at the holy feet of that Vicar of Heaven, the Pontiff, "who crept into his sacred office by the arts of the fox, ruled while he occupied it with the ferocity of a lion, and quitted it by the death of a dog;" and the opposing pleaders were Corso Donati and Dante Alighieri; but the cause was already prejudged. In vain the great man prostrated himself at the feet of the little one. And such phrases were not mere figures of speech in those days. Who cannot picture to himself that scene;—the poet philosopher in his Florentine "*lucco*,"—the long graceful robe which the picture of him has made familiar to our eyes—kneeling before the Pontiff's footstool, and with upturned look, while every feature of that wonderfully expressive and strongly-marked face was working with intense anxiety and passion, pleading for the right of his native Commonwealth to manage its own affairs, and to be allowed to work out unimpeded the great problem of self-government; urging on the dull ears of the worldling in St. Peter's chair considerations of far-seeing prudence and policy, and venturing, with words of burning eloquence, to remind the Simoniacal pastor, who little heeded or com-

prehended such considerations, of the lofty theories of his office, which should lead him to seek only the advent of peace on earth and goodwill among men. A.D.  
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Boniface, with his hard worldly face, sardonic nose, sensual mouth, double chin, and cold shrewd eye,\* sat and heard him, and deluded him with specious professions, seeking to detain him at Rome. But the fate of Florence was decided. And when Corso Donati, in addition to the Pope's private motives † for taking part with the Neri, told him that the Bianchi were in fact but a resuscitation of the old anti-papal Ghibelline party; that, if they were not put down, Guelphism, and papal influence with it, would be at an end in Florence; and ended by proposing that the Pope should induce some foreign potentate to cross the Alps and accept the government of Florence in connivance with the Neri, and to the utter destruction of their adversaries; the scheme fell in, and adapted itself so exactly to another which Boniface was bent on, that it needed little persuasion to induce him to adopt it eagerly.

The Pope, in fact, had been already scheming to invite Charles de Valois, the brother of King Philippe le Bel, into Italy, for the purpose of putting him up as an opponent to the Arragonese dynasty in Sicily. And now there was a double inducement to offer him, and a twofold motive for bringing him. And of course either one would have sufficed to bring the hungry Frenchman across the mountain frontier of the land of corn, wine, and oil.

Charles of Valois waited for no second invitation, but came at once; and, having landed at Pisa, and journeyed thence to Lucca, passed by Pistoia and Florence, but without entering either city, to join the Pope in the neighbourhood of Rome, at Anagni, which he reached in September, 1301.

\* See portrait in *Gesta Pontificum*, auctore So. Palatino. Venice, 1687.

† His money relations with the Spini, which have been explained already.

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1301. Dante had seen that his efforts were vain ; and had left Rome with rage and gloomy foreboding of coming calamity in his heart, to experience in various wanderings “the bitterness of the bread of charity, and the weary labour of passing up and down a stranger’s stairs.”

“ Sî come sa di sale  
Lo pane altrui, e com’ è duro calle  
Lo scendere e ’l salir per l’ altrui scale.” \*

\* Paradiso, Cant. xvii. v. 59.



## CHAPTER V.

Incapacity of the Bianchi—Elements of power in their hands—The Bianchi not Ghibellines—Cowardice of the Cerchi—Sciatta de' Cancellieri, Capitano—Charles of Valois sends a messenger to Florence—"Il gran rifiuto"—Dante alluded to Vieri de' Cerchi—Charles admitted to the city—The Guild of Bakers—The arrival of Charles in Florence—His treachery—Tumult in the city—Doubts and indecision of the Signory—Impotency of the government—Summons of the people—Disregarded—Charles occupies the *Oltrarno* quarter—Symptoms of anarchy—Corso Donati forces his way into the city—Falsehood of Charles—Tocsin sounded—Portents—Anarchy in the city for six days—Charles connives at it—His rapacity—The Neri established in power—Cardinal Acquasparta sent a second time to Florence—His attempts to reconcile the two parties—Florence again placed under interdict—Ecclesiastical censures disregarded by the Florentines—Bianchi banished—Charles quits Florence.

It was decided between the Pope and his *protégé* Charles, that the latter should start on his Sicilian enterprise in the following spring. The autumn and winter therefore were free for the Florentine part of the work for which he had been invited. The Bianchi party, who were in power in Florence, had for some time past known that the Neri were conspiring with the Pope and with the French prince; and even after his arrival in Italy, they had nearly two months in which to bestir themselves in providing against the misfortunes which they must have seen were about to fall upon them;—which at least they ought to have foreseen, and which the best men among them unquestionably did foresee. Dante had no doubt about the fate that was in store for Florence, when his efforts failed to avert the doom that was to hand it over to the "pacification" of a

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French prince. Dino Compagni,—who remained in the city, and energetically strove to the last to organise a party, which, forgetting their past feuds and jealousies, and acting in a spirit of patriotic compromise, might be able to defy the wiles and the force of the stranger,—Dino Compagni, as his chronicle abundantly informs us, knew well the nature of the danger which menaced the Commonwealth. But the Bianchi were not equal to the position they held in the state. They ingloriously failed in their duty as rulers, as statesmen, and as patriots. All the authorities agree in stating, and in showing yet more clearly than they state, that the Bianchi, had they been equal to the occasion, might have saved the country. They had assuredly a finer opportunity than had ever yet fallen to the lot of any party in Florence. The leaders of the Neri were in banishment. Their opponents had the masses of the people heartily with them,—the whole of that “*popolo minuto*,” who hated the Neri for the insolent violence with which they had attempted to set themselves above the law; who were jealous of those “*popolani grassi*,” the fat whig burghers who wanted to monopolise Guelphism and the profits of it, and the honours of the state; and who abhorred the notion of being handed over to the mercies of a foreign ruler with that instinctive patriotism of the soil that often exists more strongly among the children of the soil than among their more cosmopolitan superiors. They had some of the wealthiest men in the city for their leaders; and they had almost all those noble descendants of the old Ghibelline families, who, though doubtless very different men from their high-handed sires, and though the old name of their extinct political faction was in one sense a source of weakness and embarrassment to the Bianchi party, inasmuch as it gave the Neri a cry against them which had not yet lost all its old power, nevertheless ought to have possessed enough of the old

military efficiency of their race to have served as available captains; and finally, they had possession of the city. Yet they allowed the tide and the time to run by them, and did nothing. A.D.  
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The cry against them as Ghibellines was, after all, not worth much. Very few probably were the dupes of it. Pope Boniface, even if he was sufficiently ignorant of the real state of politics in Florence to be persuaded that there was any possibility of the old anti-church-temporalities Ghibellinism again becoming dangerously in the ascendant, would, nevertheless, have acted exactly as he did without any such persuasion. What we have seen of his real motives in the matter leaves no possibility of doubt on this point. And though some modern writers have been led into the mistake by paying more attention to names than to things, and by forgetting that party names, above all others, are apt to survive the ideas and principles and aims which they originally designated, the reader who bears in mind what has been said in the last chapter of the composition of the Bianchi and Neri parties, will not fall into the same error. So far from nourishing any hopes of the resuscitation of their old party were those descendants of the old Ghibelline races, that there was not a man among them who did not prefer to forget the antecedents of his family and call himself Guelph. The Guelphs had long since been recognised on all hands as the definitively winning party. Florence was Guelph. Everbody was Guelph. Guelphism was orthodox at Florence. And, though some people accused their neighbours of heterodoxy, nobody claimed or admitted heterodoxy to be his creed. Family names even had been changed by those who bore them, to get rid of the taint of Ghibellinism which hung about them. But the great mark of distinction, which puts not only all identity but all similarity between the old Ghibelline party and the modern Bianchi party out of the question, is this,



A.D. 1301. —that the Bianchi had the people with them. They were essentially the popular party; the party by and through which the great outside people might hope to move forward to that attack on the barriers of the exclusivism of their superiors, which was the ever-constant object of the Florentine populace, and the steady progress of which furnishes the key to the right understanding of all this period of Florentine history.

So strong was the party of the Bianchi in the attachment of the people, that it was thought that at that moment the Cerchi might have had the entire command of the city and the government, if they had only had the energy and courage to put themselves at the head of the people. But the Cerchi had neither the courage nor the ambition to accept any such pre-eminence. "They refused," says Dino Compagni,\* "more from cowardice than from virtue." The position which Dino Compagni would have had them assume was an illegal usurpation of power, which, under other circumstances, would have constituted the highest treason against liberty and against the State. And in such a case it is hardly just to assume that the man who adopts the determination to act according to law, does so from cowardice, and not from reverence for legality. But there can be little doubt that the refusal of the Cerchi to assume, at that crisis, the reins of a vigorous authority, which the city was willing to entrust to their hands, was the cause of all the deplorable evils that followed. Florence, united under and guided by competent leaders, would, in the opinion of those who were most able to form a judgment upon the point, have been well able to defy Charles and his small band of French cavaliers. But without leaders of any kind the people could do, and did, nothing.

\* "Più per viltà che per pietà," book i. p. 26.

When the Cerchi refused to come forward and put themselves at the head of the city, the Signoria appointed a Messer Sciatta de' Cancellieri, a leader of the Bianchi in Pistoia, *Capitano* in Florence, investing him with ample military authority. But he was very far from being the man needed for the emergency. "He was a conscientious man," says Dino Compagni,\* "but timid, and averse to war. He did not take the city into his hands as he ought to have done, nor in any way make himself feared by the enemy. The soldiers were not paid. There was no money in the exchequer; and the Signory had not courage to impose taxes to recruit it. The *Capitano* took no energetic measures; he did not banish any of the traitors from the city. He talked big, and threatened, and did nothing. The generality of the citizens who did not know the real state of matters had a blind confidence in the Cerchi; and reflecting on their great stake in the county, and their reputation for prudence, flattered themselves that all would go well. But the wiser men, who saw behind the scenes, had sore misgivings, and said to one another, 'They are but tradesmen, after all; and naturally cowards.† Their enemies are men of violence, and masters of the art of war.'"

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To the end the Cerchi manifested the same utter incapacity and imbecility; and when Charles of Valois was but a few hours distant from the gates,—when even then a bold attitude and an energetic determination to defend the city might have saved it from all the miseries that followed; and when a portion of the citizens earnestly desired to adopt such measures, and nothing but a leader

\* Book i. p. 26.

† A coward, in the most ordinary sense of the term, old Vieri de' Cerchi assuredly was not. But he had not the moral courage to assume the position of pilot at the helm when the vessel of the State was drifting among the breakers.

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of influence was needed to unite the masses of the people in a determined resistance to the entrance of the foreigner within the walls,—the Cerchi utterly refused to take the place of such leader, and finally voted for replying to the messengers sent by Charles from his halting-place, a day's journey from Florence, that he would be allowed to enter the city. They still trusted to a spontaneous rising of the people against him, ignorant that a populace may rise in revolt under the smart of evils which it has felt, but never does so unled, as a measure of precaution against ills which have not yet been experienced. The people were willing to be led; nay, asked for a leader; but Vieri de' Cerchi refused that post of danger, difficulty, and honour, and Florence was lost for want of the one good man at least within its walls, without whom, even as in the parable of Holy Writ, the city could not be saved.

And surely it is impossible to read the history of those days, especially as it is set forth in the pages of Dino Compagni, Dante's colleague and political friend, without feeling convinced that Vieri de' Cerchi and no other was he whom the poet-politician condemns for having made "*per viltade il gran rifiuto*"—that memorable cowardice-counselled refusal, which has so much and so long exercised the learning of the commentators.\*

\* The well-known and much-disputed passage stands thus at verse 58 of the 3rd canto of the *Inferno*:—

“Poscia eh' io v' ebbi alcun riconosciuto,  
Guardai, e vidi l' ombra di colui  
Che fece per viltade il gran rifiuto.  
Incontanente intesi, e certo fui  
Che quest' era la setta dei cattivi  
A Dio spiacenti ed a' nemici sui.”

“As soon as I could recognise any one, I looked and saw the shade of him who made from cowardice the great refusal. Suddenly I understood and was certain, that this was the band of caitiffs, odious alike to God (*i.e.*, to that part of the Florentines who held Dante's political opinions) and to his enemies (*i.e.*, to the adverse party, the Neri).” This band of caitiffs was



Marching northwards by Siena, Charles came to the Castle of Staggia, now an extremely picturesque ruin among the oak woods traversed by the railway between Siena and Poggibonzi, and, halting there, sent messengers to Florence. They were instructed to assure the Florentines that the French prince was coming among them wholly for their good, and induced by no other motive than his great affection for the city of Florence.\* They requested of the Signory to be allowed to address the people in council assembled; and they were permitted to do so. They had brought a Volterra lawyer with them as spokesman, a foolish, false man, says Dino, who talked a quantity of trash about “the Blood-Royal of France having entered Tuscany solely to make peace between Holy Church and the parties in Florence,” and how “the citizens might implicitly trust him, because the Blood-Royal of France never deceived either friend or foe.”

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And then a whole crowd of citizens rushed to the tribune, each anxious to be the first to speak in favour of admitting the prince,—some, Neri, who were his accomplices and inviters,—others, again, timeservers, who were anxious to

surely those who, by their cowardice in the hour of need, made themselves hateful to the wiser part of their own party, and who were of course hateful to the Neri. The most common explanation of the passage, which supposes Celestin, who refused the Papacy from motives of conscience, to be alluded to, is in my mind wholly inadmissible. How is it possible to suppose that the meek, pious recluse, who refused the Papal tiara because honestly he thought he was not fitted for it, should for that act be placed by Dante among those displeasing alike to God and his enemies? I think the passage in the poem, and the passage in the history of Florence, so mutually throw light on each other, that there can be little doubt that the explanation in the text is the true one. But I must not allow the reader to suppose that the merit of having discovered the sense of this long disputed passage is in any wise mine. It belongs to a far more competent Dantean scholar, Dr. H. C. Barlow, whose admirably reasoned pamphlet on “*Il Gran Rifiuto*” (Trübner & Co., 1862) first suggested to me the truth. I much recommend the reader to consult Dr. Barlow’s pamphlet, which excellently elucidates this passage of Florentine history.

\* Villani, book viii. chap. xlix.; Dino Compagni, book ii. p. 31.

A.D. 1301. curry favour with the new power,—some cowards, who were desirous only to avoid all chance of fighting. The Signory declared that, in a case so new and grave, they would not take upon themselves to decide on the answer to be given to the messengers, but that each of the city guilds should be severally consulted on the subject. They were so; and every one of the major guilds—*arti maggiori*—and every one of the minor, with the exception of that of the bakers, voted that the prince should be admitted to the city. The stout bakers alone returned their vote to the Signory, that “he should neither be received or any mark of respect paid to him; for he came only to ruin the city.”

Of course this one dissenting voice was of no avail; and the answer returned to Staggia was, that Charles might come.

On the 4th of November, 1301, he entered the city,\* and went to lodge in the house of the Frescobaldi; on the site of that immense and magnificent building now standing at the foot of the Trinità bridge, on the further or southern side of the river, and on the left hand of one crossing the bridge in that direction, but which has ceased to belong to the family still extant in Florence, having some centuries since become a convent. The Signory had wished to lodge him on the other side of the river, where Charles of Anjou had dwelt. But the Neri preferred to carry him to the quarter beyond the Arno, that they might fortify themselves there, and hold that part of the town by force, in case any rising of the people should drive them from the other quarter of the city.

The French prince entered Florence with his retinue ostentatiously unarmed. The poor citizens were at once persuaded that their magnanimous ally—(it was the second trial of French disinterested friendship this time)—really

\* Dino Compagni, book ii. p. 34.

had the welfare of their city at heart. And when on the morrow of his arrival the formal inauguration of Charles in his office of peacemaker—" *pacierio* "—was to take place, they formed a magnificent *cortége* to do him honour. A numerous band of horsemen, splendidly arrayed as for a tournament, with flags flying, and all the horses with silken housings, escorted him, and all the city was on foot to see the sight. A.D.  
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There were many men in Florence who looked on that pageant with anxious misgiving, and suspiciously watchful glances gleaming out from under the shelter of their long-peaked hoods. Many also—the whole party of the Neri, indeed—were perfectly aware of the plot of the drama about to be played, in which they were performing well-understood parts. But, with the masses of the people, all was confidence and well-pleased enjoyment of the spectacle. "Why should we trouble ourselves with talk of fighting? Does this look like fighting? We shall have peace, and all will go well." \*

So Charles and his retinue, and his escort of citizens, went in grand procession through the gala-day-looking streets to the church of Santa Maria Novella. And there were assembled "the Podestà, and the Captain, and the Priors, and all their councillors, and the Bishop, and all the notables of Florence," † to receive him. Then Charles, after his toady ‡ spokesman had set forth the scope and object of his coming, made formal demand that plenary authority in the city should be confided to him, for the purpose of reconciling the parties at feud, and distributing the places and honours of the government equally among them. He also promised, on the honour of a king's son,

\* Dino Compagni, book ii. p. 31. † Villani, book viii. chap. xlix.

‡ Villani's word is "*aguzzetto*," an inciter, or prompter. But it was always used in a bad sense, and is very difficult to translate. It means his "earwigger," his suggester of mischief.



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In truth "the Blood-Royal of France" did not retain the mask of dissimulation one instant longer than was necessary to his purpose. The powers he had asked for were confided to him; the assembly broke up; and even as those who had been present in the Church left it to return to their homes, they found the aspect of the city most ominously changed. The soldiers, whom Charles had brought into Florence with him unarmed, were now seen suddenly with armour on their backs and arms in their hands. An alarming number of strange faces appeared in the streets, and among them some not wholly strange, but which had not for some time past been seen there. Before long it was first rumoured, then ascertained, that large numbers of Lucchese, Sienese, and others had been quietly introduced into the city by twos and threes at a time. More ominous of evil still were those not wholly unknown faces, mixing here and there among the crowds of strangers,—the faces of exiled Neri, whose sudden presence in Florence at that critical moment was strangely suspicious, to say the least of it. Altogether it soon became known that the French prince had twelve hundred armed men in the city at his orders.

Charles returned to his quarters in the Frescobaldi palace, and bided his time. The remainder of that day was remembered for many a long year afterwards. The people, as quickly alarmed at the sudden change which had been brought about in the state of things in the city,

\* Villani, *loc. cit.*

as they had an hour before been unreasonably confident and unsuspecting, hurried to their homes, and prepared as best they might to defend them, and raised barricades in various parts of the city. The Priors, among whom was Dino Compagni, either as in office, or as one of the leading members of their Council, were sitting in permanence in the *Palazzo Pubblico*, dismayed, divided in opinion, and utterly at a loss what to do. The remaining hours of the day wore away in unprofitable talking; the night was near, and nothing was done. The Signory were distracted by a succession of interviews with all kinds of people. Some urged one thing, some another. Some, as the Priors well knew, were traitors, who, under the hypocritical semblance of friendly advice, were seeking to promote their treasonable designs. Among other proposers of nostrums for the occasion, a holy man, one Fra Benedetto, held by the people to be a saint, came to them, and, begging for a secret audience, assured the Priors that the only plan to save the Commonwealth was to issue immediate orders to the Bishop to make a procession through the city. "We followed his advice," says Dino Compagni,\* "and got well laughed at for our pains; for people said, it would have been more to the purpose to sharpen our swords." "The Signory," he says again, "were goaded on all sides. The loyal part of the citizens came imploring them to look well to their protection and that of the city. The traitors impeded them by questioning the legality of every measure. And between the demands made upon them and the answers to these, the day melted away. The Barons in Prince Charles's retinue occupied the Priors' time with long speeches; and so they passed the hours in great trouble and perplexity. \* \* \* \* \* "We passed strong resolutions, and severe laws, and gave the executive authorities

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\* Book ii. p. 37.

A.D. 1301. summary powers for repressing tumult and street broils. We enacted capital punishments, and caused the block and the axe to be placed on the Piazza for the execution of them against the disobedient. We increased the powers of Messer Schiatta, the Capitano, and exhorted him to do his duty. But all was to no purpose. For even the officers, and messengers, and bailiffs attached to the Signory were traitors. It was discovered that twenty of the tipstaffs had agreed for a thousand florins to murder the whole Signory. These traitors were forthwith turned out of the palace. The government strove hard to save the city from the evil designs of the enemy. But all was of no avail, because they used mild and pacific means, when what was needed was promptness and energy. Against thorough perversity, moderation is of no avail.”\*

Meanwhile, despite the headsman’s block and the axe displayed on the Piazza, the city was filled with riots and hostile encounters between the adverse parties; and among the notices recorded of such occurrences we meet for the first time with the name of Medici, certain “powerful *popolani*,” of which family one is stated to have attacked and left for dead a citizen of the “White” faction. The Medici therefore, it seems, were, on this their first appearance, in arms adverse to the freedom and legal government of their country.

As things were evidently becoming worse and worse, the Signory, a little before nightfall, as a last effort, sent messengers through all the wards to summon the city bands to come armed to the palace at the dawn of day. But the city was already too much demoralised. There were no chiefs to rally the people. Very few came to the Palazzo, “although the *Gonfalone di Giustizia*—the great civic standard—was exposed from the window of the

\* Dino Compagni, book ii. p. 38.



palace." Those who did come, and displayed their flags for a few minutes, very soon slunk off to their homes. The Podestà did not send his posse of troops, nor even arm them, but left all his duty to the Priors; "instead of proceeding, as he might have done, at once to the houses of the disaffected, with fire and sword." The Priors, "who were not versed in warlike matters, were fully occupied by the numbers of people who insisted on audiences. And again, the night closed in."\* As soon as it was dark, all the people withdrew from the Piazza to their houses, and spent the night in making them as far as possible capable of defence, and in constructing barricades of timber in the streets.

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The next day, matters were yet worse. Prince Charles had demanded that the "Oltrarno" quarter of the city—that on the southern bank of the river—should be wholly given up into his keeping;—that the Florentine guards at the gates should be changed for French soldiers, and the keys of the city given up to him. Of course the pretext for such a demand was, that he feared treason from the citizens, and that his safety required these precautions.

Two other facts also came that morning to the knowledge of the Signory, which seem to have well-nigh brought them to the point of giving up their hopeless task in despair. The circumstances attending the first of these show indeed the utter imbecility and confusion to which the government was reduced. A rich and powerful private citizen had come to the palace, warning the Priors that they would do well to fortify one of the gates of the city, which was in a bad state of repair. The Signory told him to do as he pleased in the matter, and placed at his disposition a gang of workmen, who were sent with the banner, indicating that they were engaged on the public service. But news

\* Dino Compagni, book ii. p. 39.

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The other tidings, which greeted the baffled, bated, and despairing government, were, that a man had been arrested in the course of the night, who, in the disguise of an itinerant vendor of drugs, had been going round to the houses of all the leaders of the Neri, warning them to be prepared and armed the next morning early, for that a blow was about to be struck.

“From all this, what with tidings coming in from one quarter and from another, the Priors saw that they could no longer stand against the storm.”\*

It soon became manifest, too, what the blow to be struck that morning was; nothing less than the entry into the city of the banned and banished rebel Corso Donati, with a band of armed followers. He had found the gates shut; but with axes and fire had forced his way in by a postern in the immediate neighbourhood of his own palace. Messengers came from Charles to the Priors, sitting dismayed and helpless in the Palazzo Publico, in their council-chamber where no council was, assuring them on his royal word that he had only permitted Donati to enter the city in order to take the more signal vengeance on his audacity. He said that his—the prince’s—intention was, that the authority of the Signory should be preserved intact; that

\* Dino Compagni, book ii. p. 40.

he would hang Messer Corso as a traitor and a rebel ; and that if he, Charles, did not execute on him such vengeance as should satisfy them, they were welcome to take his own head off. Meantime, he said, it would be best for the maintenance of order and tranquillity in the city, that all the leading partisans of both sides, whose names were written on a list he gave them, should be sent to him, to be retained for the present, till the crisis was past, in his custody. A.D.  
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To this also the perplexed and frightened Priors were weak enough to assent ; and the Bianchi chiefs were either sufficiently cowed, or sufficiently consistent supporters of legality, to put their heads into the trap. At the command of the Signory, they, and those of the Neri named in the list sent in by the traitor Frenchman, went to the Oltrarno quarter, and gave themselves up to him. The Neri were dismissed in a few hours : the Bianchi retained in close custody.

This overt act of treachery seems at last to have opened the eyes of the masses of the people. But it was too late. The city was too thoroughly disorganised and demoralised. The Signory ordered the tocsin bell to be sounded. But no one heeded its summons. Not a man came into the Piazza, save three or four of the Adimari family. And when they saw that they were alone, they returned to their palace, and the Piazza was left empty ; a dreary and hopeless outlook for those poor Priors from the windows of their palace, while the tocsin bell over their heads kept ringing out its angry call to the citizens, ineffectually for the first time in the history of the Commonwealth.

The populace were now persuaded that the French prince was come among them, not as a peacemaker, restorer of order, and friend of the government ; but as an enemy, and patron of licence and confusion. And the result of their persuasion, though it might a few days before have



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1301. been different, was now only to induce the timid and the quiet to shut themselves into their houses, and the ill-disposed and the turbulent to profit by the anarchy into which the city had fallen, and the time of licence and lawless violence which they judged to be at hand.

But the last drop in the cup which over-filled the measure of the misfortunes of the unhappy Priors, was the appearance in the heavens of a fiery cross immediately over the Palazzo Publico. It remained visible for some minutes, "so that all those who saw it, as I myself saw it clearly," says the cultivated and shrewd statesman and historian Dino Compagni, "might understand that God was very grievously angry with the city."\* After this phenomenon the unhappy Priors gave the matter up, and resigned their offices.

Then began a time of utter anarchy, which lasted for six long days. Every kind of horror and abomination which evil passions of all sorts, long restrained by force of law, but now suddenly unbridled and licensed to satiate their appetites to the utmost, could suggest, were perpetrated in every part of the city. Rich shops and magazines were plundered, and private houses gutted. Old grudges were fed fat, and many a patient hatred satisfied at last. Murders were done on men, and worse than murders on women, in every street and almost every house throughout the city. Corso Donati, immediately on entering Florence, went round to the different prisons and released all those confined in them. He then rode through the city, his naked sword in his hand, furiously seeking for the members of the Cerchi family, and loudly challenging them to meet him. But the Cerchi remained shut up in the fastness of their fortress home.

All this time the false traitor Charles remained inactive

\* Dino Compagni, book ii. p. 42.

in the isolated quarter of the city which had been given up to him ; and when a citizen, in the midst of all these horrors, waited on him in the vain hope of moving his compassion, and represented to him that he was permitting a noble city to be destroyed beneath his eyes, he replied that he knew nothing about the matter. Incendiary fires were raging in many parts of the city and the country around the walls. And Charles would affect to ask from time to time, "what that great light was?" And those about him would answer, that it was occasioned by the burning of some thatched cottage ; when all knew very well that the flames were destroying some rich palace.

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At the end of six days of this horrible condition of the city, the victorious party appointed new *Priori* from among the chiefs of the Neri. And then the hungry Frenchman began to show himself in his true aspect. "Being a nobleman," says Dino Compagni, "of great and disorderly extravagance," money was his great object, and he began to use all sorts of means to wring it from the people. He inveigled the members of the Signory, who had just quitted office, into his power, under pretence of an invitation to dine with him ; and then detained them, demanding money as a recompense for a variety of insults and injuries which he declared he had received from them. The honour of France, he declared, had been offended by their ingratitude, and could only be healed by large money payments.\* Perhaps the reader may require to be reminded that the historian who records this wrote in the fourteenth century. A great many other rich citizens were arbitrarily imprisoned by this French peacemaker, and threatened with being sent as prisoners into the south of Italy if they did not ransom themselves with large sums ; and in this manner "the Blood-Royal" succeeded in squeezing a very considerable

\* Dino Compagni, book ii. p. 43.

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1302. sum of money out of the city.\* All which was so well understood between the Church and this, her "eldest son," that when, after having established the Neri in power, Charles returned to Rome, and asked the Pope for money, the Pontiff replied that he had already placed him at the very fountain head of gold!'

The Pope, however, professed to think that matters had been carried rather too far in Florence; fearing that Europe, or rather Italy, might in some degree be scandalised at the proceedings of the "peacemaker," sent by him to that unhappy city, and thinking moreover that the change in the position of the parties, which he had been earnest to bring about, was now sufficiently achieved, he a second time despatched Cardinal Acquasparta on a mission of reconciliation.† And upon this occasion it seemed as if his real object was to restore peace to the city. When he had previously come to Florence, he found the Bianchi in power: and his first care had been to assist the Neri in supplanting them. Now that the latter had effectually accomplished that object, his aim was to induce the Bianchi to acquiesce quietly in their defeat; and in this sense he came in earnest to make peace. But, as it has been remarked in a former chapter, no party in these mediæval Italian civic contests was ever utterly crushed. Assassinations, imprisonment, exile, confiscations, legal disabilities, destruction of homes and properties, failed to accomplish this. And low at the bottom of Fortune's wheel as the Bianchi were now, they were not prepared to acquiesce in a deprivation of all share in the government of the city; nor were their enemies prepared to behave towards them with any such moderation and abstinence from all that seemed to them the sweets of triumph, as could only make peace and reconciliation tolerable to the

\* Villani, book viii. chap. xlix. ; Dino Compagni, book ii.

† Villani, book viii. chap. xlix.



vanquished party. The Cardinal succeeded, indeed, in bringing about two or three marriages between members of the rival colours, attaining thereby, as might have been anticipated, no result except the addition of a mass of domestic misery and discord to the other evils of the time. He attempted also to induce the Neri to admit some members of the Bianchi to share in the offices of the Commonwealth; but this they utterly refused to do. It would have appeared to them to be absolutely throwing away all the fruits of the victory it had cost so much to win. The object for which an Italian civic party always contended was just this, and no other; to have the monopoly of the "offices," the honours, power, place, and station in that which they nevertheless pretended to call the "commune."

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The Neri would hear of nothing of the kind. And a second time the Cardinal departed from the stiff-necked city in high dudgeon, shaking the dust from his shoes in prelatical fashion by again leaving the town under interdict.

It was a very remarkable and peculiar feature of old Florence, the duck-like impassibility of its back to the ecclesiastical rain of censures and excommunications, and interdicts. The present is the fourth or fifth occasion on which we have already seen the city laid under that terrible ban. How terrible it was to other communities; how great nations have been thrown into distress, and almost dissolution, by it; no reader of history needs to be reminded. But whether it were that the Florentines had incurred the penalty so often that they had become hardened to it, or whether the exceeding and exuberant vigour of the communal life had established so strong a hold on the heart of every Florentine, that even ecclesiastics on the bank of the Arno were citizens before they were priests, certain it is that nothing further is heard of these repeated interdicts, and that the consequences of

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them must have been very unimportant. In one or two cases there still remain documents, showing that the city authorities laid their commands on all priests to discharge regularly all their functions in spite of the inhibition of Rome. And it would seem that the Signory had no difficulty in causing its authority to be paramount in the matter.

We shall have some further opportunities of observing that the Florentines were in several respects less priest-ridden than other people of Italy. The inquisition was always of the mildest there. And in those cases in which persecution was permitted, it is in every instance evident that there were political reasons for the exercise of it.

After the Cardinal's departure, a continual series of quarrels and outrages showed the futility of his endeavours to bring about any approach to a reconciliation between the parties. But still the Bianchi did not quit the city in a body. And it would seem as if the Neri did not feel their triumph to be complete till that should have been accomplished. And the object was attained at last by treachery. One of the nobles in the train of Charles concerted with some of the Neri to get up a pretended conspiracy against the French prince, in which a few of the Bianchi were induced to join, by promises that, if he were once got rid of, the Neri would make no difficulty of sharing fairly with them the offices of the Commonwealth. Compromising letters were obtained from them, or, as Villani says,\* were fabricated, and were forthwith carried to Charles, who, whether he were an accomplice in the plot, as is most probable, or were the dupe of it only, proceeded at once to pass sentence of banishment on all the leading men of the Bianchi party. They quitted Florence on the 4th of April, 1302, and found refuge, some at Arezzo,

\* Villani, *loc. cit.*

some at Pisa, and some at Pistoia ; and, as usual, their houses were destroyed and their property laid waste. A.D.  
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In the same month Charles de Valois, having, as Villani says,\* “performed that for the doing of which he had come to Florence,” also departed southwards, bound for Sicily. There his arms were so little successful, that he was shortly constrained to make a not very creditable peace ; so that men said,† “Messer Charles de Valois came to Tuscany as peacemaker, and left it in a state of war, and went to Sicily to fight, but made instead a disgraceful peace.”

\* Book viii. chap. 1.

† Villani, *ibid.*



## CHAPTER VI.

War with Pistoia—Ghibellinism out of Florence—Expeditions against the Ubaldini—Evils of inviting foreign princes to intervene in the affairs of the city—Temper of the populace—Courtèd by Corso Donati—His character—Accusations against Dante—Anecdote of Corso Donati—He liberates the prisoners in Florence—Scarcity in 1302-3—Corso demands the revision of the accounts of the Signory—Civil war in the city—Lawlessness of Florentine society—Bishop heads the party of Corso—Preference of the Florentines for a foreign to a native ruler—Street war—The Lucchese invited to reduce the city to order—They do so—Anecdote of Ponciardo de' Ponci—Benedict the 11th sends the Cardinal Niccolo da Prato to Florence—His policy at Florence—His endeavours to restore the Bianchi to the city frustrated by trick—The Cardinal goes to Prato—Fails to pacify that city—Again pronounces the city under interdict, and leaves it—Anecdote of a scenic representation on the Arno—Feeling of parties in the city—Street broils—Second mention of the Medici—Neri Abate fires the city—Bianchi foiled in seizing the city—Neri endeavour to set aside the popular constitution of the government—Twelve of the Neri summoned by the Pope to Perugia—Plot of the Cardinal di Prato—The Bianchi attempt to seize the city—Again foiled in their attempt—Robert, Duke of Calabria, general of the Tuscan forces—Siege of Pistoia—Account of it by Dino Compagni—Duke of Calabria quits the siege in obedience to the Pope—Pistoia taken—Expeditions against Ghibelline castles—Effects of exile on the Bianchi—Consequences of the existence of *fuorusciti*—Monte Acinigo taken—Cardinal Napoleone Orsini makes war on Florence with a Ghibelline army—Tricks the Florentines by a stratagem—Excommunicates Florence yet again—Florentines reply by taxing church property—Monks of the Badia di Firenze resist—The convent sacked by the people—The party thus acting against the Church were Guelphs.

THE thrusting out of the Bianchi—the losing party—from the city, and the destruction of their goods and homes, was all according to usual Florentine ways and habits. And the ordinary course of things after such a

proscription was a series of quarrels with, and expeditions against, the cities in which the exiles were received. Nor was the usual march of events altered in this respect on the present occasion. The year did not pass without war with Pistoia, the nearest of the cities in which the exiled Bianchi had found refuge. Lucca, as a Guelph city, joined Florence in this war, the result of which was the conquest and dismantling of Pistoia, and the division of its territory between Florence and Lucca. The *Guelphism* of Lucca, it will be observed, caused it to join Florence, then under the government of the Neri, in this war against Pistoia. And it may seem that this is not in accordance with what has been said of the extinction of Ghibellinism in Florence. The fact is, however, that Ghibellinism was not so dead in other cities as it was in Florence, and *the name*, as a party-cry and a means of rousing the prejudices and passions, was not obsolete in Florence. Hence the Neri, who most affected pure Guelphism, reviled the Bianchi, who had among them many descendants of the old Ghibelline families, as Ghibellines; and the Bianchi, when in exile, were thrown into alliance and association with the real Ghibellinism still existing in the other cities.

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Expeditions against the Ubaldini in the Mugello, and against some others of the old feudal families still remaining in remoter districts of the country, followed the exile of the Bianchi quite in the old style, after any turn in the ever-revolving wheel of Florentine politics, which brought the Guelphs uppermost.

But two new elements had come into play among the forces which had the fashioning of Florentine fortunes in their hands; and their presence serves to complicate very considerably the simple ups and downs of the two great parties, the alternations of which have hitherto made so large a portion of this history.

One of these two new elements was the influence and

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1302. growing power of the "*popolo minuto*," as distinguished from the "*popolani grassi*" of the "*Arti maggiori*;" and the other was the fatal habit of calling in foreign potentates to assist the citizens in preserving "order" in the city; or, in other words, to enable one party of them to get their feet on the necks of the adverse faction. The free burghers ought to have been more apt at learning the lesson so luminously taught them by the earliest of these princely "peacemakers," "protectors," and "restorers of order," and reiterated in constantly identical terms by each one of the unhappily prolonged series even to the end of the chapter. Two French magnanimous allies have already been tried. Charles of Anjou, in 1267, was bad; Charles of Valois, in 1301, very much worse. It will be seen that the warning which these two cases of putting their trust in princes gave so loudly, but gave in vain, was one which it was fatal to neglect. "I see the time," writes Dante:—

"Tempo veggh' io, non molto dopo ancoi,  
Che tragge un altro Carlo fuor di Francia  
Per far conoscer meglio e sè, e i suoi.  
Senz' arme n' esce, e solo con la lancia  
Con la qual giostrò Giuda."\*

Truly, there was more of prophecy in the words than their inspired author dreamed!

But of the two new elements to which the attention of the reader has been called, it was the first that began to exercise an influence on the history of the Commonwealth immediately after the departure of Charles de Valois.

Notwithstanding the old antagonism between the Ghibellines and the people, and the fact that the remains of

\* "I see a time, not much later, which brings with it another Charles out of France, to make better known to us himself and those of his nation. Without arms he sets forth, save with that same lance which Judas used."  
—Purgatorio, canto 20, v. 70.



the old Ghibelline party belonged, for the reasons which have been explained, to the white party, that party also for the most part comprehended, as has been seen, the "*popolo minuto*." Their anger against the rich and aristocraticising bourgeoisie, which had plotted against Giano della Bella, and had in some degree betrayed the people into clamour against him, and their respect for Vieri de' Cerchi, who had been Giano's supporter, were much stronger than their hereditary enmity to the Ghibelline party. A.D.  
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But when the chiefs of the Bianchi had been banished; when the populace was thus left without any leaders to whom to attach itself, and when Messer Corso Donati began to bid in many ways for the adherence and support of the masses, a change in the fickle affections of the multitude began to manifest itself. The association with the Ghibellines of foreign cities into which the Bianchi were naturally and necessarily thrown by their misfortunes and exile, may also have contributed to the same result, which was doubtless also yet further fostered by a growing coldness between Corso Donati and the other Guelph nobles, on the one hand, and the "*popolani grassi*," who had formed an important portion of the Neri party, on the other.

Corso Donati was a man eminently calculated, both by his good and evil qualities, to make an able and dangerous mob-leader. He was daring, powerful in body, a ready speaker, handsome in person. The pride of birth and station, for which he was so notorious, and which came into unpleasant collision with the antagonistic pride of the wealthy burghers who constituted the most solid strength of the Neri party, was less personally offensive to the populace, whom the haughty "baron" well knew how, and by no means disdained, to court. He was reckless, unscrupulous, violent, and had all those instincts of lawless-

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ness, which find sympathy, and may be made to pass for heroism, with that part of every population to which law is less known as a protection and a security, than as a restraint. He was a man, too, endowed with native power of intelligence above the average. And the reader, who has known him only such as he became, when troubled and anarchical times had given opportunity for all the worser qualities in his character to develop themselves, hears, with some surprise, that in earlier years Dante, who was nearly connected with the Donati family by his marriage with Gemma, was much attached to Messer Corso, who was several years his senior, and took great pleasure in his conversation.\* It is needless to say, that later in life, when the patriot poet and the reckless democrat noble found themselves ranged under hostile political banners, this intimacy ceased ; and when the former had taken a prominent part in efforts to avert the curse of foreign domination from his country ; and the latter had shown himself the unprincipled abettor of that domination, and fosterer of the lawlessness which resulted from it, implacable enmity took the place of former friendship. And Corso Donati was mainly instrumental in procuring those decrees of banishment, confiscation, and death by fire, if he should fall into the hands of the Florentine government, which have been felt through every succeeding age to be a disgrace to Florence, and one of the blackest blots on her history.

The falsehood of the trumped-up charges of speculation and malversation during his period of office, on which the poet was condemned, are too well known to need insisting on here. But it is well to omit no opportunity of making known a most curious and important discovery of the learned antiquarian, Lami, which informs us, on contemporary authority, of the real cause of the implacable persecution against the poet. In a volume of the state papers of

\* Missirini, *Vita di Dante*, chap. 21.

the period, in which a statement is made of the sums paid by the Signory to Charles de Valois, a contemporary hand has written on the margin: "The true and secret cause of Dante's exile was his opposition to these payments." \* A.D.  
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To return to Corso Donati.

There is an anecdote on record respecting him which is sufficiently characteristic of the nature of the man, and therefore worth telling. He had a very beautiful sister, named Piccarda; whom he and his brothers had promised in marriage to Rosellino della Tosa, as a means of strengthening a political alliance. But the unhappy girl, to avoid a marriage which was hateful to her, escaped to the convent of St. Clare, and there took the vows. Messer Corso was at Bologna at the time. But on the news reaching him, he instantly came to Florence with twelve ruffians in his train, and going straight to the convent, scaled the wall, dragged his sister by force from her asylum, despite her vows and the protests of the community, and consigned her to the man to whom he had promised her. But terror of the scene she had passed through, and the horror of her present position, were too much for the hapless girl, and poor Piccarda Donati, at the end of a few days, found a refuge beyond the reach of brutal husband or ruffian brother.

It had been a special object with the well-meaning but weak *Bianco* government, which had been in power at the time of Charles de Valois' arrival in Florence, to prevent this dangerous and lawless man, then in exile, from returning. It has been seen how the mission of the French prince to Florence as "peacemaker" was plotted for by Donati, and how the return of the latter to the city was connived at, despite his oaths to the Signory, by the false Frenchman. It will be remembered also that the

\* Missirini, chap. 22.



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first care of Messer Corso, on entering the city, was to go round to all the prisons, and liberate without distinction all their inmates. The men thus turned loose on the city formed the nucleus of that popular party which Donati was desirous of forming in the city as a basis for his ulterior designs. Of course, this act of compendious gaol delivery was an eminently popular one with a certain portion of the citizens; and was equally distasteful to those well-to-do owners of rich warehouses and shops, who formed so important a portion of Donati's party. His haughty insolence and overbearing disregard for law made him from day to day more distasteful to, and distrusted by, the "*popolani grassi*," and the growing breach between them was yet another title to the favour of the "*popolo minuto*." Besides all these things, this Florentine Catiline, as Dino Compagni calls him, was sure to be seen active in every street riot to which the general disorder of the times and the increasing turbulence of the populace gave rise; and was equally sure to be heard on the popular side in all the questions to which this temper of the people gave rise.

It was impossible that the state of feeling which had grown up between Donati, supported by the Guelph nobles, his fellows, and the "*popolani grassi*," could continue long without breaking out into open disturbances. And an occasion soon presented itself. The winter of 1302-3 had been one of great scarcity. Wheat, says Villani, was sold at half a golden florin the bushel,\* and had it not been that the government had made large and timely importations from Sicily and Apulia, there would have been famine in Florence. This importation of corn, and the transactions attending the distribution of it necessarily caused very large sums of money to pass through the hands of the government, composed of those wealthy plebeians whom Messer Corso was bent on ruining. With this object he

\* The sixteenth part of an ounce of pure gold.

insisted that the accounts of the government should be submitted to revision ; and spread accusations of fraudulent dealing and speculation against the Signory. They, whether from the indignation of conscious innocence or the fears of conscious guilt there are no means of knowing, absolutely resisted all such supervision. The Bishop, Messer Lottieri della Tosa, took a conspicuous part on the side of Donati and the nobles ; and four noble families, among whom were the Spini, the great bankers, joined the party of the people. And the entire city divided itself into two hostile camps to fight out the dispute.

Truly a strange state of society, and one as little calculated as can well be imagined for the feat of successful self-government, in which such a dispute could lead to such a means of arbitrament ! Surely, if any political question whatever were to be decided by appeal to recognised law, it might have been expected that such a point as this would have been so. But the war to the knife which blazed forth in an instant throughout the entire city on this question of the auditing of some accounts is very characteristic of the singular readiness with which a highly policied community may at any moment ignore all that centuries of political existence have achieved for it, and resolve itself into an elemental condition theoretically anterior to the primal social contract, where the body politic is on so small a scale, that all the members of it have a direct and immediate share in the governing of it. It is well,—nay, it constitutes the very ideal of civil government,—that every portion of the society to be governed should exercise an influence on the business of governing. But it would seem that that indirectness of action and complicity of forces putting one another into motion, like the different parts of the mechanism of a complex machine, by which in large states it is alone possible for the body of the society to act on the governing power of it, is abso-

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lutely necessary for the regularising and tempering the action of forces, which, allowed to operate primarily and simply on the social machinery, would throw it out of gear. The Englishman, who is habituated to the idea, that any portion of the law under which he lives can only be changed by putting into motion a complex series of social forces and influences, readily comprehends that the law, however objectionable to him, must be obeyed meanwhile. But the old Florentine's conception of self-government implied that, if any part of the law or constitution which governed him was amiss, it was the duty as well as the right of a majority of the society forthwith, and by simple primary action, to change it. And of course the question, as to what was "the majority" had to be decided by wager of battle. For there was far too much of the aristocratic element, even in that most republican of republics, and far too little patriotic virtue, for the acceptance of a decision based on universal suffrage, even if a perpetual recurrence to such a test had been either practicable or desirable.

Clubs and all sorts of associations of men constantly come to an unsuccessful end, and are broken up, because the social bond cannot stand being brought under the direct action of the primal forces of society. And the constantly recurring dangers that rendered the political existence of Florence so turbulent, and so often menaced it with dissolution, arose from a similar cause. It was an experiment of self-government under circumstances the most difficult, and demanding for the possibility of success a very exceptionally high degree of political knowledge and civil virtue; a perfection of civilisation which Florence did not, and hardly could have been expected by any possibility to, possess.

The state of tumult and anarchic confusion to which this dispute respecting the accounts of the Signory gave rise, was worse and more desperate than any of the more



partial street riots, which had recently been so rife in the city. Barricades were erected; the principal palaces of the city were turned into fortresses; mangonels were erected on the roofs and towers, and the whole city became a battle-field of civil war, as it used to be, says Ammirato,\* in the old times, during the contests between the Uberti and the citizens, or between the Guelphs and Ghibellines.

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It was not without crafty design that Corso Donati had induced the Bishop to make common cause with him in heading this disturbance. Already murmurs were becoming rife in the city which hinted at the danger that this powerful, popular, able, and unscrupulous man might have conceived the thought of making himself absolute master of the Commonwealth. Such a danger was ever before the eyes of the mediæval Italian Communes; and the history and fate of numbers of the once independent communities around them, especially to the eastward of the Apennines, abundantly justified the jealous vigilance and apprehensions of every popularly constituted government. This was a point on which every class of the population was even morbidly susceptible. No popularity-hunting manœuvres, no pandering to other less deeply rooted passions of the masses would have enabled a man to hold his ground at that time in Florence, against such an accusation once generally believed. And it is curiously characteristic of the degree to which civic and personal jealousy was stronger than patriotism, or the real love of liberty in the hearts of these people, to observe how much less detestable and more tolerable to them it was to submit themselves to a foreign than to a native tyrant. It is an ugly blot on the character of those energetic life-abounding Florentines in whom there is so much to admire. If we absolutely cannot succeed in governing ourselves,—if we must, to save us from cutting each other's throats even to the last man,

\* Book iv. Gonf. 67. Villani, book viii. chap. 68.

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set a ruler over us, let it at least not be one of ourselves ; —not a fellow-citizen, who is our equal, and whose elevation would be a party triumph ! Any scrap of foreign nobility rather ! Any crowned, or coroneted grandee, possessor of the genuine “ blood-royal of France,” or other, whom we can believe to be not altogether of the same flesh and blood as ourselves ! let him come and rule us, and, if he oppress us, at least oppress all equally. It is impossible to avoid seeing a taint of the servile nature in this, an absence of nobility of sentiment, a want of any real appreciation of and love for liberty, or at least a subordination of that love to other and stronger passions, which goes far towards explaining the catastrophe in which the great Florentine experiment in polity ended.

Corso Donati had laboured hard, and had succeeded well in attaching to him the lower portions of the Florentine populace. But the suspicion that he was aiming at supreme power, if once credited, would have been enough to ruin him. His great object therefore was to avoid standing alone, or too preeminently as the leader and mover of the civil war he was raising. And the adherence of the Bishop gave the contest just that appearance of being a national struggle for a public cause, which was so essential to his views. To make this the more conspicuous, he fortified the Bishop’s palace, and made that the principal head-quarters and rallying point of his partisans, as the *Palazzo Pubblico* was that of the government. And the fighting was carried on between these two fortresses, just, says Ammirato, as if it had been two independent communes at war with each other. The Signory in their Palace fortalice felt that they were defending their lives. For they doubted not that Corso, having pushed matters to such extremity, would have sent them all to immediate execution, had he got them into his hands. The condition of the city, and of the territory around it, was meanwhile

one of pure and simple anarchy. Murder by open violence, assassination by the secret stab of private enmity, pillage, burnings, and violence of every kind filled every street and every hour. A.D.  
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In the midst of this terrible state of things came the time for a new Gonfaloniere and Priori to enter office. The latter were appointed in double number, in consideration of the dangers of the time. And the step they took on coming into power, as the sole means open to them of staying the absolute ruin of the city, was a remarkable one. They sent messengers to the friendly government of Lucca, entreating the Lucchese to come in force, and put down the disturbances for them. The Lucca rulers, however, considering that the danger of interfering between two such combating parties might be very like that which proverbially attends interference between man and wife, replied, that although they were willing, for the sake of good-will towards Florence and good neighbourhood, to expend their toil and their means freely in the Florentine service, yet it appeared to them that they could not do so to any good effect, unless very ample powers of exercising unlimited authority at Florence were conferred on them. It may easily be conceived that matters in the haughty City of Flowers must have come to a very desperate pass, when we find that this humiliating proposal was at once assented to. The most ample and extraordinary powers under the seal of the Commonwealth were at once despatched to Lucca; and a large Lucchese force of horse and foot was immediately sent to Florence, and the gates of the city, the public buildings, and all the most important defensible points of the town were given into their keeping. All rule and authority was delivered into their hands, and all public documents, orders, or proclamations were to run in the name of the Government of Lucca.

The Lucchese acted happily with good sense and good



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1303. faith. They declared that it was no part of their office to inquire into the past, or to blame, and much less to punish, either party, or any individual for aught that had been done. Their sole business, they said, was with the present time, and their sole object to put down all violence. All the decrees and proclamations which had to be published for this purpose were formally put forth, and proclaimed by the heralds and criers, "in the name of the Republic of Lucca!" And it must be owned that the hearing of such words in the streets of Florence must have been bitter enough to Florentine pride. It was intolerably so, as the record tells us, to one Ponciardo de' Ponci; who, while a crier was making proclamation in the above form, slashed him with his rapier across the face, exclaiming as he did so, "Is it come to this then with us in Florence!" The Lucchese took no further notice of the outrage, than for the future to suppress the irritating formula which had led to it. By such moderation and firmness they succeeded entirely in putting down all disturbance, and reducing the city to tranquillity. They remained sixteen days in Florence; took part before they went in appointing the new Gonfaloniere and Priori, who were to succeed those by whom they had been summoned; and then quietly returned to Lucca, leaving an example probably quite unique of a foreign power invited to interfere in the concerns of an independent State, and quitting it after accomplishing the object for which they were called, without seeking either to retain power, or to make profit in any way out of the interference.\*

In the meantime Benedict XI. had succeeded to Boniface VIII. in 1303; and when the news of these remarkable events at Florence reached him, he determined that he also would send a peacemaker to Florence to complete the good work done by the Lucchese, being induced thereto either by jealousy of a success so greatly contrasted with

\* Ammirato, book iv. Gonf. 68. Villani, book viii. chap. lxviii.

the failures in the same field of previous papal envoys; or by a desire of keeping up a certain prestige which former Popes had gained by making themselves the arbiters of Florentine quarrels; \* or possibly even by a desire of doing what he deemed his duty. So he despatched a Dominican friar, named Niccolò da Prato, whom he had recently raised to the Cardinalate, to Florence with instructions to see what could be done towards laying the foundations of a lasting peace in that distracted city.

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The Cardinal arrived on the 10th of May, 1304, and was received with all honour and welcome. And full power and authority was given him to make such regulations as he might deem necessary for the business in hand. The Dominican, however, who is represented as having been a very shrewd and able man, soon perceived that little permanent good could be done, unless he could not only reconcile those who had so recently been fighting in the city, and who both sides of them belonged to the Neri party, but could also bring back the exiled Bianchi, and reconcile them with their fellow-citizens. He also shortly discovered that the feeling of the nobles in the city and that of the people on this subject was by no means the same. The latter, comprising both the "*popolo minuto*," who, it will be remembered, had on the first breaking out of the Bianchi and Neri feud attached themselves to the former, and the "*popolani grassi*," who were disgusted with Corso Donati's arrogance, and began to conceive fears as to his ultimate designs, were not disposed to make any objection to the restoration of the exiled faction. But the Guelph nobles of the Neri were as bitter as ever against their old rivals; and were evidently prepared to oppose to the utmost the Cardinal's scheme. He, therefore, used all the authority which had been entrusted to him to strengthen the hands of the popular government, and

\* Ammirato, book iv. Conf. 69.

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1304. restore to its pristine vigour the influence of the popular element in the State, which had suffered much since the establishment of the “Arti” and the “Priori,” both by the intermarriages of nobles with the upper bourgeoisie, and by the natural results of a period of turbulence and violence.

And the Cardinal had already brought matters so far as to have procured the attendance of twelve representatives of the exiled Bianchi in Florence to discuss the terms of their restoration; several meetings for the arrangement of these had already taken place, and the negotiation seemed on the point of being successful, when all was broken off and thrown into confusion by a treacherous stratagem of the nobles, who had watched the progress of the Cardinal’s scheme with the utmost disgust and displeasure.

Enough has been said in a previous chapter to explain—(what is absolutely necessary to be understood for the right comprehension of this intricate portion of Florentine political history)—the degree in which the Bianchi were in truth Ghibellines, and the more substantial points in which they differed from them. It will be remembered also, that real old Ghibellinism, as has been said, was not by any means so nearly extinct in some other of the cities and provinces of central Italy, as it was in the more vigorous and popularly constituted Commonwealth of Florence and its territory. It will, therefore, readily be understood, that the leaders of the Bianchi, forced by their exile to consort with the Ghibelline partisans in the cities in which they found a refuge, finding among them in right of their hereditary Ghibelline connection a friendly reception and support which they could meet with nowhere else, and separated from that popular portion of their own party, as it was constituted at home in Florence, their connection with which mainly prevented them from being, and proved that they were not, Ghibellines,—separated from them in-



asmuch as the body of the people of course did not share the exile of the party chiefs ;—it will readily, I say, be understood that, under such circumstances, it was likely enough that these exiles should in some degree fall back into the principles and politics of real Ghibellinism, and plot schemes of restoration to their country by the aid of Ghibelline intrigue. But though Ghibellinism in Florence was so nearly obsolete and dead, that the Bianchi notwithstanding their Ghibelline blood had been a popular party, the name of the old feudal sect and the ideas connected with it were still sufficiently remembered and sufficiently hated in Florence, for it to be very easy to rouse the enmity of the people against anybody to whom a suspicion of real old Ghibellinism could be attached. And yet more fiercely was the popular indignation sure to be excited by any apparent danger of a return to old Ghibellinic times and principles to be brought about by letting in a tide of foreign Ghibellinism to swamp the constitutional government of the city.

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On this popular susceptibility was based the trick by which the chiefs of the Neri, with Corso Donati at their head, succeeded in frustrating the plans of the Cardinal. Letters purporting to be written by him, and sealed with his seal, addressed to the Ghibelline leaders at Bologna and other cities of Romagna, were forged, and produced in Florence as having been intercepted by the patriotic vigilance of the Neri chiefs. In these letters a large scheme of re-establishing Ghibellinism in its old ascendancy everywhere in Italy was revealed, and the Ghibellines were invited to march in force on Florence to assist in restoring the Florentine Bianchi to their homes by force, as the first step in the plan. A certain degree of plausibility was given to the fraud by the fact that the connections of the Cardinal were, and his sympathies were supposed to be, Ghibelline. And nothing more was needed to rouse the fury

A.D. 1304. of a population on whom the cry of "Ghibellinism" produced during many generations exactly similar effects to those which the cry of "Popery" could once excite among ourselves.

The success of the fraud was complete and instantaneous. The twelve representatives of the Bianchi, fortunately lodged near the St. Nicholas gate, escaped for their lives from the city, and succeeded in reaching Arezzo. The Signory, feeling that they were powerless to protect the Cardinal, and fearing violence even to his sacred person, advised him at once to leave the city under the decorous pretext of proceeding to Prato, his own native place, for the purpose of reconciling the parties which divided that little city also.

It was hoped that the good results which he should accomplish there might be the means of convincing the Florentines that their suspicions were unfounded. But the Cardinal sped worse at Prato than even at Florence. He managed there to make men of one mind only, in so far as all agreed in reprobating his interference and driving him from the city. He returned thence to Florence; and finding there the attitude of the people rather more than less hostile than before, he finally took his departure on the 4th of June, 1304, pronouncing, as his predecessors on similar missions had done, a fresh interdict on the city, and "uttering again and again terrible menaces that a people which had refused to receive benediction and peace at the hands of the Legate of the Vicar of Christ should remain under the eternal malediction of God and of Holy Church."\*

An incident is recorded by the chroniclers as having happened in the earlier days of the Cardinal's sojourn at Florence, while he was still in favour with the people, and

\* Ammirato, book iv. Gonf. 69.

they were anxious to make him welcome to the city in all ways, which was noted in the fourteenth century as a remarkable warning and intimation of the wrath of heaven at the events which were to signalise the departure of the holy guest from Florence, and which the nineteenth century may find amusing as an illustration of the manners of the time.

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The ward of St. Frediano,—that part of the city which lies at the foot of the Ponte alla Carraia on the further side of the river, and is still marked by the name given up to the present day to the city gate which opens on the Leghorn road,—wished to distinguish itself by offering a fête to the Cardinal, which should be magnificent and at the same time specially adapted to the sacred character of the guest whom they wished to honour. So it was determined to regale the dignified Dominican with a representation of hell and the torments of the damned depicted “to the life.” The river at the Carraia bridge was selected as the scene of the show, and the spectators were assembled in crowds on the bridge above, then constructed of wood. A vast quantity of artificial fire of all the most orthodox hues was prepared as the main ingredient of the scenery. And in the midst of this, on boats and rafts on the river were seen scores of demons busily engaged in inflicting divers kinds of torments on “the naked souls,” represented, it is to be supposed, by naked bodies, which raised a truly infernal clamour of shrieks and cries and groans. The scene was at its height, and the interest and satisfaction of the beholders proportionably intense, when all at once the bridge, burthened beyond its strength by the vast crowd of the spectators, fell with a crash into the hell beneath, overwhelming the devils and their victims, and the crowd of gazers in one common ruin and indescribable mass of inextricable confusion. What with the fall and the injuries from the timbers of the ruined bridge, and drowning in



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Of course it was vain to hope that the city, under the circumstances in which it was left at the departure of the Cardinal da Prato, could return to order and peace. The Bianchi, excited by the near prospect that had been held out to them of returning to their country, and by the certainty that the Pope's Legate, and the belief that the Pope himself, was their partisan, would assuredly make renewed attempts to regain their situation in the city by force since negotiation failed them. And the use of force implied reliance on the assistance of foreign Ghibellines. And such aid implied a danger of the renewal of Ghibelline ascendancy in the city. The Neri and Guelph nobles stood therefore anxiously on their guard against any such catastrophe, and strove to rouse the fears and enmity of the masses against the exiles. The people hardly knew to which side to attach themselves. The "*popolani grassi*," of whom they were jealous, belonged mainly to the Neri party, the chiefs of which, whether nobles or plebeians, of the "fat" class, having the government in their hands, were continually transgressing those "*Ordini di Giustizia*," which the populace still fondly looked to as their Palladium and Magna Charta. On the other hand, they were frightened by calculated and assiduous representations of the Ghibellinism of the Bianchi. A vague and uneasy suspicion of the intentions of their social superiors of either party kept them in a state of perpetual excitement, eagerly on the look-out for each day's fragment of news, ready to give credence to every alarming report, and prepared at every minute to rush with arms in their hands into the street, and take part with small knowledge of the cause for which they were fighting in any broil that might fall out.

And broils in such a state of things were of course

abundant. And now again, for the second time, we meet with the name of the Medici as powerful *popolani*, unlike most of their class, popular among the masses; but supporting the party to which the wealthy bourgeoisie was for the most part attached; and prominent in the street fights which were frequently taking place, on the Neri side.

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Very shortly after the departure of the Cardinal a party of the Bianchi, aided by those of their faction within the city, and on this occasion supported by the greater portion of the populace, very nearly succeeded in getting possession of the city by a *coup-de-main*; and would probably have done so, but for an act of rare atrocity, which seems to have been perpetrated not with any view to aiding either party, but from mere wantonness of wickedness. A priest, the Prior of San Pietro Scheraggio, one Neri Abati, "a man void of every virtue, and in whom every vice had its home," \* in the midst of the confusion arising from the raid of the Bianchi, fired the city in two places, at San Michele in Orto, and in the narrow street in the very heart of the city, still as then called Calimala, from being a principal seat of the guild of merchants so named. A strong north wind was blowing at the time. The fire spread with uncontrollable fury, and consumed the almost incredible number of one thousand and seven hundred houses and churches; in short, as Ammirato says, "the whole centre and heart of the city." The quantity of property destroyed was utterly incalculable. Many families were entirely ruined. The Cavalcanti and the Gherardini were specially sufferers by the calamity. The former "lost everything, and sweated blood that day, as they looked on the burning of their houses and palaces and shops which enriched them by the high rents paid in that quarter, where space was so restricted and so valuable." † And as those two families were the main supporters of the Bianchi inside

\* Ammirato.

† Dino Compagni, book iii. p. 63.

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the city, and the abettors of the present attempt, the sudden diversion of all their attention and all their energies to the care of their own burning property, had the effect of turning the scale of the struggle against the Bianchi, who were driven in flight from the city.

The dreadful state of confusion, distress, and depression in which these struggles and calamities left the city threatened to give rise to yet more fatal misfortune, which was only averted by a menace from the opposite quarter of the political sky, in such sort that the two storms neutralised each other.

Corso Donati had been kept quiet during the late events by a fit of the gout. But his restoration to health and activity, and his return to the city was, as ever, the signal for new disturbances and trouble. The disheartened and demoralised condition of Florence seemed to the chieftains of the Neri to offer an opportunity for setting aside the "*Ordini di Giustizia*," and ousting the people from all share in the government, so as to change the constitution to a purely oligarchic one. It might have been very safely predicted, that no such attempt would have permanently succeeded in Florence at that time. The political education of the people, and the events which were resulting from it, and at the same time contributing to it, were preparing them, as any competent student of social science might have seen, for eventual submission to tyranny. But that stage in their national life had not yet been reached. It was still far off in the future. The Neri chieftains, however, thought otherwise, and were preparing for the attempt.

But the Cardinal da Prato, whose indignation at his ill success at, and humiliating departure from, Florence we have witnessed, was at the same time preparing a scheme intended both to avenge the affront he had received, and to promote his own political views. Representing to the



Pope, who was then at Perugia, the turbulence and disobedience of the Florentines in the darkest colours, and assuring him that there could be no hope of peace or tranquillity in Florence unless the Neri leaders were removed from the city, he induced Benedict to summon twelve of these, with Corso Donati at their head, to appear before him at Perugia, and give an account of their conduct. As it did not enter into their policy to venture on an open quarrel with the Papacy, they all obeyed, travelling to Perugia with a retinue of more than a hundred and fifty horsemen, a pomp which, says Ammirato, "was felt at the papal court to exceed the modesty of the usual Tuscan simplicity." Their absence from Florence, however, was all that the Cardinal desired. For he had plotted to do in reality exactly that which the Neri had unjustly accused him of doing when he was in Florence. He sent letters round to all the Ghibellines in Pisa, Arezzo, Pistoia, Bologna, and the cities of Romagna, telling them that now or never was the time to strike a blow for the restoration of the Bianchi to their country, that the Neri chieftains were absent from the city, and that the Pope had called them to him expressly to afford the Bianchi an easy opportunity of seizing the city. The Bianchi and their Ghibelline friends acted at once on the hint with such readiness that a very large force was assembled at La Lastra, about seven miles from Florence in the direction of Pisa, before the Florentines had received the slightest intimation of the movement. When the tidings of the vast assemblage at La Lastra reached the city, "there was confusion such as there has rarely been in Florence, so that when it was known that so large a body were in such close vicinity to the city, the citizens occupied themselves during the night before the day on which the Bianchi and Ghibelline army should reach Florence in hiding away their goods in places of security, instead of in taking

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thought for the defence of the walls. But the large forces collected did not arrive before Florence as expected; for they wasted a day at La Lastra in waiting for other allies to join them, and thus lost the chance of surprising the city."

But the manner in which this danger neutralised, as has been said, that other threatened by the domestic treason of the Neri, was by necessitating an union and good understanding between them and the people for the defence of the city. And this was produced by the fears of either class. The people feared that the Bianchi leaders, if victoriously entering the city by force of arms, and backed by the despotically-inclined Ghibellines of other communities less free than their own, might be as much inclined as their rivals the Neri to destroy the popular constitution, and might perhaps join with them in doing it. There seems indeed to have been some whispered report in the city that such a coalition between the rival leaders against the people was in contemplation. The chiefs of the Neri, on the other hand, feared that the Bianchi, if successful, especially with such a backing of poor Ghibellinism behind them, would keep whatever they could snatch for themselves alone, and would be contented with nothing less than such an unlimited ascendancy in the city as could be secured only by driving the Neri out of it in their turn.

The people, therefore, and the Neri combined to defend the city from the attack of the Bianchi forces; and owing to the delay at La Lastra in the first instance, and to the singular want of judgment and ability with which the attempt to seize the city was made in the second, they succeeded in doing so. The Bianchi effected an entrance into the city by the Porta St. Gallo, but placed the main body of their forces in a manifestly untenable position in the immediate vicinity of the Piazza San Marco, on the ground

now occupied by the royal stables, where the men were exposed to the full violence of the midsummer sun, and no water was to be had. A smaller detached body, which made its way further into the city, was entirely routed; and tidings having at the same time reached the main body that an anxiously expected troop of allies from Bologna had on nearing the city, and perceiving the unpromising position of matters, turned back; the discouragement produced by this, and the prospect of having to hold their ground shelterless and waterless during the hottest hours of the day, proved too much for the fortitude of these civic warriors. The men began to slink away from their standards, as the Florentines pressed on them from the front; and very shortly an uncontrollable panic seized the entire body, which was now only eager to escape from the city by the way it had come. For awhile the Florentines, unable, as Ammirato says, to conceive such disgraceful cowardice, and supposing that it was a stratagem to draw them out of the city, made no attempt to pursue the fugitives. Later in the day, however, some mercenaries, moved rather by the hope of booty than by any necessity of fighting, went out of the city after the retreating force, and killed and plundered many of the hindmost of them. Several also were brought prisoners into Florence and were summarily hanged on a high gallows in the Piazza St. Gallo, and on the trees along the road outside of it, where they were allowed to remain for many days. This battle took place on the 20th of July, 1304.\*

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The accord between the Neri leaders and the people, which resulted from their united action and common success against the Bianchi, permitted the Florentines to

\* Ammirato, book iv. Gonf. 70. There is reason to believe that Dante was among the Bianchi on this occasion.



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employ the remainder of that year, 1304, in sundry expeditions, quite in the old style, against various fortified castles and towns, which exiled chiefs of the Bianchi, putting to profit the opportunity afforded by the internal troubles of Florence, had caused to rebel against the Commonwealth. In all these they were successful. But as it was very clear that the Bianchi, after their late disgraceful failure, united as they now were in alliance with the Ghibellines of other cities, and favoured by the Pope, would not remain long quiet, or abstain from organising other attempts to regain their homes and obtain the mastery of the city by force ; and as it was judged to be wisest to anticipate rather than to wait for such attacks by crushing the Bianchi faction in the friendly cities, in which its chiefs found a refuge ; it was decided by the government in the last days of 1304, to seek the aid of some foreign leader of reputation, competent to command their forces in the larger enterprises which this policy would necessitate.

Unwarned by their ample experience of the consequences of putting their trust in princes, the Commune entered into arrangements with Charles II. of Naples, for the services of his son Robert, Duke of Calabria, as general of the allied Tuscan forces.\* The duke arrived in Florence in the following April, bringing with him, according to the terms of his bargain, three hundred mounted cavaliers and a considerable force of infantry ; and on the 20th of the following May led them, together with the Florentine and Lucchese forces, to besiege Pistoia, then the principal stronghold of the Bianchi faction. The siege which followed was one of the most remarkable for the obstinate

\* The "Taglia," of which mention is so frequently made by the Italian historians, was a permanent league of such of the Tuscan cities as could agree on a general course of policy. The "Taglia," whose forces the Duke of Calabria was to lead, consisted mainly of Florence, Lucca, and Siena.

courage, pertinacity, and dreadful sufferings of the defenders, and for the atrocious cruelties practised by the besieging force, of all those of which the Italian mediæval annals are full. Long details of the horrors of all sorts by which it was characterized, might be compiled from the pages of the contemporary historians; but the following striking passage from Dino Compagni, who is absolutely roused by the subject out of the impassive calm with which the Italian historians generally narrate every event however moving, will suffice to give an idea of what the siege of a walled city might be in those days.

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“How beautiful, excellent, and abounding a city are they destroying!” he exclaims. “Its citizens, a handsome and well-grown race beyond all other Tuscans, the possessors of so delightful a home, surrounded by lovely streams, fertile hills, and abundant plains, weep, and wring their hands. Brave and warlike as its men are, but given to discord, and of fierce passions,\* the city had become well-nigh desolate from the consequences of these qualities. Whence it came to pass, that in a brief space of time its fortunes waned; and it was besieged by the Florentines till the distress was such in the town that men ate human flesh, and submitted to the amputation of their own limbs that they might be used as food. \* \* \* When this dreadful time was passed, and the cruelty of cutting off the noses of the women and the hands of the men, who driven by famine essayed to escape out of the city, was brought to an end, the conquerors turned their rage on the beautiful city itself, which was destroyed as though it had been but a single farm-house. Of the particulars of the siege, of the dangers and famine endured, of the various assaults, of the deeds of daring that were done by those shut up within the walls of the fortresses which were lost

\* The universal testimony of those times attributes this character to the Pistoians above all other Tuscan cities.

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by treason, I do not intend to write. For all this some other will no doubt tell, who, if he tell it well, will have no dry-eyed readers.”\* Again he writes: “The rulers of the city, for want of food, turned out of the gates the poor, the children, the widows, and nearly all the women of low condition. Alas! how much the most cruel thing of all to the citizens must it have been, to see their women and children led to the city gates and turned out into the hands of the enemy, while the gates were shut behind them! And unless any one of them chanced to have powerful relatives outside the city, they were shockingly treated. And the exiles from Pistoia, who knew them, and recognised in them the wives and children of their enemies, misused them terribly. \* \* \* But the piteous sight was to look on those who had been mutilated in the camp, and were laid with the bleeding stumps of hands and feet at the foot of the wall, in order that their fathers, brothers, and sons might see them and not have the possibility of helping them. \* \* \* Far more tolerable doom had Sodom and Gomorra, and the cities of the plain which were swallowed up in a moment, than that which was awarded to Pistoia! Ah! how awfully did the anger of God visit them! what untold and dreadful sins could they have been that merited such a judgment!”†

But while Florence was engaged in this terrible and savagely-conducted siege, the Cardinal da Prato was not forgetful of his grudge against the excommunicated city,

\* Dino Compagni, book i. p. 25. The reader who consults Dino Compagni must be on his guard against being led into confusion by him on points of chronology. The passage in the text refers to an event posterior to the time of which the historian is apparently speaking in the context. And such instances occur so frequently in Compagni's chronicle, that I am inclined to suspect that the existing MSS. must have been disordered, or not reduced to order by the copyists. And the editor, Manni, who was more encyclopedically than critically learned, has done nothing for the work in this respect.

† *Ibid*, book iii. p. 68.



and his plans for restoring the Bianchi to their ascendancy in the government of it. Benedict XI. had died in 1303 and after an interregnum of more than a year had been succeeded in the Papacy by the Frenchman, Bertrand de Goth, Archbishop of Bordeaux, under the title of Clement V., who transported the Papal seat into France, and commenced the "Babylonian Captivity" of the Church. The new Pope, at the instigation of the Cardinal da Prato, sent two legates into Tuscany, one to the government at Florence, and one to the camp before Pistoia, commanding the first to recall the army, and the second to raise the siege. But none of those to whom these behests were addressed paid the slightest regard to them, except the Duke of Calabria; who, as the Florentine historians seem to think, acted shabbily in looking after the safety of his own soul, instead of sticking to his word and his flag, and doing the work for which he took their pay. The duke, however, contented himself with taking care of his own private soul and body, by quitting the camp himself, while he left his troops to continue the siege at their own personal risk and peril of all kinds, which they for their parts were very desirous of doing, for when Pistoia should fall there was prospect of good plunder.

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Pistoia did fall on the 10th of April, 1306, with the results that have been described in the above extract from Dino Compagni, and the further consequence of dividing the entire territory, which had belonged to it, between Florence and Lucca.

This great work having been successfully accomplished, the Florentines resumed their operations for the repression of the Ghibelline friends and allies of their exiles the Bianchi in various directions. The accounts of these expeditions against the fortified castles of Ghibelline barons, seem to the reader as if he had gone back in the history a hundred years. It is exactly the old work, which the

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growing Commune was then perpetually engaged in, and which it appeared to have done so thoroughly. And it seems extraordinary that the necessity in which it found itself of again crushing the bruised head of Ghibellinism did not lead Florentine statesmen to reflect on the natural operation and consequences of the fatal system of party proscriptions, which made every political contest in the Commonwealth culminate in the expulsion of one half of the leading men in the city, who were thrown for every hope of restoration, not only to political power but to their homes and property, on the sympathy and alliance of foreigners and enemies. Whatever were the political errors and prejudices of the exiled party, they were sure to return with them more exaggerated and more obsolete. Lengthened exile, especially from a community more advanced to one less advanced in social civilization, can never fail to make the victims of it more unfit for their own country than they were when they left it. And this mischief, less immediately obvious, but perhaps even more eventually fatal than the primary and evident one of constant wars, is very notably illustrated by the condition of matters in Florence at the crisis in question.

The Bianchi were not Ghibellines when they were driven from Florence. At least they were such, as has been explained, in no mischievous sense of the term. Their Ghibellinism did no harm, and would never more have done any harm to Florence. They had been swept onwards by the strong stream of Florentine progress beyond that. And in Florence there was no danger that they should float backwards against that strong and rapid current. But in exile the case was different. Every month of exile, of forced association with, and reliance on the real Ghibellines of foreign cities, of identification in the eyes of Italy, and in interest with the great Ghibelline name and party, was throwing them back on the

ancient ideas and principles of the real old Ghibelline Toryism, was destroying all that the political atmosphere and popular associations of Florence had done for them, and was making them more and more not only a present embarrassment but a future danger to their country.

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The operation, in short, of the system of political proscriptions was much as it would be with us, if on every fall of a Tory Ministry, every Tory of note in the kingdom were forthwith sent to find sympathy for his grievances, make political friendships, and plot wars in Paris or St. Petersburg, or other such atmosphere of despotism. Under the influence of English air and soil the Toryism of a Castlereagh is improved into the Toryism of a Peel, as under the influence of those of Florence the Ghibellinism of an Uberti was modified into that of a Guido Cavalcanti. But in exile the process was reversed.

And the remarks which have been here made are applicable to the entire course of the history to be narrated in these volumes. The violence of political animosity, the misfortune inseparable from a state of miniature proportions, which caused political opposition to be synonymous with personal enmity, the want of political principle, or at least of political intelligence, which prevented Florentine statesmen from ever recognising the rights of a minority, or the duty of legislating for the entirety and not for a section only of the nation,—these radical vices continued to make the existence of a body of "*fuorusciti*,"—of proscribed exiles, that is to say, as much a matter of course and an institution in the Commonwealth as "the Queen's opposition" is with us. And the difference in the operation of the two systems may be described as pretty accurately that which exists between a mild tonic alterative, and a recklessly violent series of blisterings and bleedings, which in due course brought the patient to his dissolution.



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The Florentines were, as in the old time, for the most part successful in these little wars against castles and fortified "harbours of our exiles." In one case the owner,—one of the Ubaldini in the Mugello,—betraying the exiles to whom he had offered refuge in his castle, a vast and very strong fortress, we are told, called Monte Acinigo, built by a cardinal of the family, proposed to sell the place to the Florentine Signory. And those worthy merchants being, as Ammirato says,\* very shrewd accountants, having calculated that a campaign would cost the city more than the sum asked, at once struck the bargain, and having duly received possession of the place, utterly razed it to the foundations, and built in the neighbourhood the little town of Scarperia, as a home for the unhoused vassals and tenants of the Ubaldini, as well as a means of holding in check any future attempt of those nobles to re-establish themselves in the district.†

It was not to be supposed, however, that the Holy See, and especially the Cardinal da Prato, would quietly submit to the open disobedience and contempt with which Florence had treated the Pope's commands in the matter of the siege of Pistoia. Yet it was difficult to know what to do with such a people. They had been anathematised, excommunicated, interdicted, and cursed in every possible form and manner till they had come to care little or nothing about it. It was useless to heap fresh curses on people already cursed as deeply as candle, book, and bull could do it, and not seeming to mind it in the least. The case was evidently one for the secular arm. So the Cardinal Napoleone Orsini, as Papal Legate in Tuscany, was ordered to raise an army among the Ghibelline cities, and see what he could do to chastise the Florentines. He succeeded in gathering together 1700 cavaliers and "an innumerable

\* Ammirato, book iv. *Gonf.* 82.† Ammirato, *loc. cit.* Villani, book viii. chap. 86.

quantity" of foot soldiers, at Arezzo; while the Florentines in nowise dismayed, under the guidance of Ardingo de' Medici, then Gonfaloniere for the second time, and very popular, got together a force of 3000 cavaliers and 15,000 infantry, with which, preferring to carry the war into the enemy's territory, they marched to the south-west of Arezzo, and having destroyed many castles on their way, undertook the siege of a strong fortress called Gargonza. But while they were thus engaged, the Cardinal, "seeing that they cared no more for the Pope's arms than for his curses, and fearing that as soon as Gargonza was taken he should be attacked himself, bethought him of a scheme by which, if he could not succeed in inflicting any punishment on the Florentines, he might at least get them back again to Florence before they had an opportunity of assuming the offensive towards him. With this view he managed that letters of his, prepared for the purpose, should be intercepted by the Florentines encamped before Gargonza, by which they learned that the Cardinal purposed suddenly marching upon Florence in concert with the Bianchi, while all its forces were absent at the camp. To make the deception perfect, he did move all his forces suddenly by Bibbiena and the Casentino towards the city. The trick was entirely successful. The Florentines raised the siege of Gargonza, and moved towards Florence by the other road of the Valdarno with such haste and precipitation, and in such confusion, that had the Cardinal attacked them on their march he might easily have inflicted on them a severe defeat. But the baffled churchman limited his wishes to being rid of the troublesome hornet-swarm which he had unadvisedly provoked, and getting them back again into their nest. And this he accomplished. Gargonza was for the time saved, and its existence prolonged for another century and a quarter. It was eventually destroyed by order of the Signory in 1433. But the tough old kernel

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1306. of it, the square tower or "*cassero*," is there yet on a rising ground overlooking the Val di Chiana, and serving for many a generation past the peaceful office of a farmhouse.

The Cardinal was thus liberated from the danger of being attacked by the Florentine forces. But he found himself in the rather false position before the Tuscan world of having made great and ostentatious preparations for crushing the disobedient citizens, only to show himself heartily desirous of letting them alone as soon as ever they replied to his provocation.

Under such circumstances, what could a puzzled and baffled churchman do but recur once again to the arms which were more familiar to him, and try if any arrow in the spiritual armoury could be found sharp enough to pierce the thick skin of Florentine irreligious indifference. He launched a fresh excommunication and interdict against the city, making the third, piled one on the top of the other, under which Florence now lay. It would be a nice point probably for the schoolmen to decide, whether a man or a city were worse off under three excommunications than under one. But the Cardinal Legate strove to add an extra sting to this last fulmen, by naming every member of the Florentine government, and making his curse specially and personally applicable to each individual of them.\*

A Cardinal Legate driven to bay could do no more, and perhaps could do no less. But Holy Church must have felt that it was a heavy and damaging blow when these curse-proof republican traders replied to this last ecclesiastical thunder by forthwith laying a heavy tax upon all church property and revenues within their dominions. The Commune, they said, was in great need of cash; and as, do what they would, their spiritual position could not

\* Ammirato, book iv. Gonf. 88. Villani, book viii. chap. 89.



be worse than it was, they had a fine opportunity of getting a supply gratis out of the jealously guarded preserves of ecclesiastical wealth. In this view of the case there was nothing to induce them to hold their hands; and the imposition laid on the clergy was a heavy one. Immense was the outcry and the resistance. But as the historian curtly remarks, "They had to pay."\* The monks of the "*Badia di Firenze*" went to the length of shutting their convent gates against the city tax-gatherers, and ringing their bells backwards in the hope of stirring up the people to support them. They *did* stir up the people. But the popular feeling, curiously similar in Florence in that far distant day to what it still is in such matters, showed itself in a very different manner from what the monks had expected. Far better citizens than churchmen, and indignant at the notion of a convent daring to resist the majesty of the Commune, they broke open the convent doors and proceeded to levy contributions on their own private account. The convent indeed was well-nigh sacked; and besides having to pay the sum, at which it had been originally rated, was condemned to lose its tower, which was destroyed accordingly, as a penalty for having turned its bells into a tocsin.

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It is remarkable to find that, as the historian specially records,† every class of the citizens, the nobles, the "*popolani grassi*," and the "*popolo minuto*" were all united, if not absolutely in the acts of the mob, at least in the sentiments which prompted them. The populace were urged on, he says, by both of the classes above them. And this outburst of anti-ecclesiastical feeling is probably the first occasion on which a case of unanimity so rare in Florence had ever been seen within its walls.

Not a little worthy of note is it also, that during all this period of defiance of the Papal power, disobedience to the Papal behests, and disregard of the Papal anathemas, the

\* Villani, book viii. ch. 89.

† Villani, *loc. cit.*

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1306. out-and-out Guelph party,—the party whose “cry” was “Church for ever!” as against the Imperial pretensions,—was in power at Florence; while the exiles, with whom the Church was leagued against these Guelphs in power, were branded in the city as Ghibellines. So entirely were the party names and party cries mere names and cries, serving purposes totally differing from and often at variance with their professed meanings.

## CHAPTER VII.

Divisions in the Neri party—Suspicious excited by Corso Donati—His marriage—Accusation against him—His condemnation—He defends himself against all the power of the city—He is overpowered—His death—Expedition against the Venetians—Against Arezzo—Duke of Calabria in Florence—Is lodged by the Peruzzi—Festivities in Florence—Money present to the Duke—The Emperor Henry of Luxembourg expected in Italy—Dante's views with respect to the Emperor—His letters to the Emperor, and to the Florentines—The Emperor's coming to Italy led to no lasting results—Betto Brunelleschi—His reply to the Emperor's ambassadors—Henry crowned at Rome—His ambassadors robbed at La Lastra—Florence prepares for war with the Emperor—Sentence against Dante—Pisa sends money to the Emperor—Murder of Betto Brunelleschi; and funeral of Corso Donati—The Emperor approaches Florence—Fails in attacking the city—Retires to San Casciano—Goes thence to Poggibonzi—And thence to Pisa—Attempts, but fails to take Castel Fiorentino—Encamps on the field of Montaperti—Is there taken ill—Goes to the Baths of Macereto—Thence to Buonconvento—Dies there—Results of his death—Suspicious of poison.

THE last failure of the Ghibellines, backed as they had been by the Papal aid and authority, sufficed to liberate Florence for awhile from any fear of ulterior machinations on their part. The city, therefore, should have been tranquil. The late successful expeditions, in which the leading Neri, the higher bourgeoisie, and the masses of the people, had been united against an enemy equally detested by all these classes, should have been a means of insuring the domestic peace of the city. The enemy against whom these successes had been won, may be considered as having been equally obnoxious to all classes of the citizens, because although the people had not been hostile to the Bianchi, when they were driven from the city, they had



A.D. 1308. the same animosity as ever against the old name and the old idea of Ghibellinism. And it cannot be denied, that the Bianchi with their present associations, allies, and aims, gave abundant confirmation to the representations of the Neri party, whose object it was to make the people see in them only the champions and representatives of pure Ghibellinism. Even in that latest affair of the attack on the abbey of San Firenze, all classes of the citizens were seen acting together and unanimously, to the extent, indeed, of allowing their common animosities to hurry them into illegal violence.

Nevertheless, peace and concord within the city were of very short duration. As soon as there were no Bianchi to unite against, the Neri divided among themselves. So abundantly clear it is, that the dissensions which divided the city at different periods under different names, had in reality but the most accidental connection with the events which were supposed to give rise to them, or with the principles which the names were held to embody. There could be under any circumstances no permanent peace or tranquillity in a community, in which a legitimate and constitutional right in every citizen to take a part in the government of the Commonwealth was combined with a thorough absence of respect for abstract freedom and for individual will; in which the whole object in dispute between parties was not how, but by whom the government should be administered; and in which the conception of recognising the rights of minorities had never dawned.

In the early part of the year 1308 there began to be visible very unmistakeable signs of a division among the more immediate personal friends and supporters of Corso Donati and the remainder of the Neri party. That ever-restless and ambitious man had returned from the Papal Court at Perugia in nowise better disposed than before to content himself with any such equal share in the honours

and power of the government as his fellows of the Neri were disposed to allot to him. He was discontented, and made no attempt to conceal his discontent and enmity towards those of his equals who were not his sycophants. "His unusually ostentatious mode of life, the extremely numerous retinue of troopers and cut-throats that he always kept about him, his house ever open to all sorts of people, his immoderate munificence, the various friendships which he kept up with many of the princes and tyrants of Italy, and in short, as is always the case, when people once begin to give a bad interpretation to things, the mien of the man, his style of speaking, his grand manner, his gait, and every gesture, word, and movement, were said to smell of sovereignty."\* For a definite suspicion had arisen in Florence, that Messer Corso aimed at nothing less than making himself despotic master of the Commonwealth. And very serious weight was added to the notion by the unquestionably suspicious circumstance of his having taken for his second wife the daughter of Ugucione della Fagi-uola, a baron of Romagna, who was in Tuscany as one of the leaders of the Ghibellines, and whose name soon became famous there for his military talents. Assuredly the daughter of such a man in such a position was about the last person with whom one in the place of Corso Donati would have thought of allying himself, had he really been a loyal and good subject of the Signory of Florence. Recollecting all the similar attempts which were made with different results in many of the cities of Italy, and considering Messer Corso's past conduct and present carriage, I feel little doubt that the accusation brought against him was not without foundation; and that he did, in fact, meditate that most unpardonable of all the sins that the citizen of a free mediæval republic in Italy

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\* Ammirato, book iv. Gonf. 94.

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could commit,—the seizing, with more or less of popular support, on the supreme power in the State, and converting the Commonwealth into a “tyranny.”

The first step necessary towards effecting his ruin, whether he were really guilty or not, was to spread among the people a belief that he was so. For it was not to be expected that such a man could be felled by the unaided arm of the law. Fighting would have to be done, and the support of the populace was therefore necessary. The popular fears and passions having accordingly been sedulously worked up to the necessary point by stories of Uguccone della Fagiola being on the march towards the city at the head of a Ghibelline force, the mine that had been laid was fired by the deposition in the “*tamburo*,” at the Podestà’s palace, of a formal accusation against Corso Donati, of “plotting treason against the State in conspiracy with Uguccone della Fagiola and other Ghibellines.” But so great was the fear inspired by Donati, and the persuasion, that if the smallest opportunity were given him, he would find some means of escaping from or overpowering the authorities, that in contravention of the provisions of the law, he was declared guilty by the Podestà within an hour after the accusation had been lodged against him, on the pretext that the near approach of Uguccone made it necessary to dispense with the usual judicial forms, and with the delays which the law assigned to a criminal for his defence. Not appearing to answer a summons of the Podestà thereupon issued, he was at once condemned to death. The bell of the Podestà’s palace was rung to call the people to arms; and the Gonfaloniere, the Capitano del Popolo, the Podestà, the Executor of Justice,\* each with all his officers, the marshal and the mounted troops of the

\* A new magistrate, recently created for the more efficient protection of the people against the nobles. It was his special duty at once to execute the sentences passed, in conformity with the “*Ordini di Giustizia*.”



Duke of Calabria, with a vast number of the populace armed, "all proceeded in one vast body to attack Messer Corso Donati."\* They found him, however, not unprepared. Short as the time had been, he had strongly barricaded the streets in the immediate neighbourhood of his house ; and, posted with his adherents and mercenary troops behind these defences, there awaited the attack of his enemies. At the first onset a great many of the citizens were killed ; and a feeling of indignation at the thought that all the city should thus be required to arm itself, and citizens' lives be lost in the attempt to execute the sentence of the law against a single man, took possession of the popular mind, and urged them to take a much more zealous part in the attack than they did at first. For, notwithstanding the care taken by his enemies, to alarm the people with stories of his treasonable machinations against the Commonwealth, many had not fully believed these, and the "*popolo minuto*" had at first been but half-hearted in the attack upon the great noble who had always paid court to the populace. The sight, however, of all the dignities and forces of the city set at nought by one man, and of the death of citizens, struck down in their attempt to uphold the majesty of the law, caused a sudden access of fury against him among the masses. And from that moment he had no chance of escaping. A band of the citizens breaking into a neighbouring garden, and there knocking a breach in a division wall, came upon his party in the rear, while they were still obstinately defending the barricade in the front. When Corso perceived this, he gave up all hope of conquest in this fight against the city, but not yet all hope of saving himself. His house was near the Santa Croce gate ; and turning suddenly on those who intercepted him in that direction, with a band of his

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\* Ammirato, book iv. Gonf. 94.

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most trusty friends and followers around him, he cut his way through them, and succeeded in reaching the open country. But the pursuers were close behind him; and some of these were the mounted troopers of the Duke of Calabria. Every one of those who had escaped from the Porta Santa Croce with Donati were overtaken, and put to death within a short distance from the city walls. He himself, being mounted, succeeded in reaching Rovezzano, a villa about three miles from the city by the banks of the Arno, on the road to Ponte a Sieve; but was there overtaken by the mounted troopers, and captured. They were anxious to take him back alive to the city; and, despite his endeavours to bribe them from their duty by large promises, had already brought him back to San Salvi, a monastery about a mile outside the Santa Croce gate. But "the Baron" was determined not to be led into the city a spectacle for the triumph, and a butt for the insults of his enemies.

There is no point in which the improved civilization of modern times has more undeniably shown itself the fosterer of a higher and nobler morality among men than in the sentiments towards a fallen foe, which the general conscience now recognises as fitting and justifiable. There was little generosity of sentiment in the days of chivalry. To triumph over an enemy insultingly, visibly, in such sort as to enjoy to the uttermost the spectacle of that humiliation, which was the daintiest treat to the pride of the victor, was the meed of conquest most highly prized on the one side, and the consequence of defeat most bitterly felt and dreaded by the other.

Corso Donati was determined to spare himself this bitterness, and deprive his enemies of this pleasure. But it was difficult to find the means of doing so. The emotions and the bodily exertions of the day had brought on a sudden access of gout in both hands and feet, which

made the fierce and proud old man well-nigh helpless. Yet the remedy, if remedy there were, must be quickly found. The city, with its thousand eyes intent to gaze on pride which had met a fall—its thousand tongues eager to take out in scoffing the servility which had hailed his every appearance in the streets with “*Viva il Barone!*”—all this agony was one short mile ahead of him. Irresistible, inexorable force was around him. His helpless hands refused to do even the office of self-murder. Yet the desperate old man found the means of cheating his captors out of the death they grudged him. Suddenly, as they were passing the monastery, he threw himself from his horse to the ground; and the soldier by the side of him, startled by the sudden action, and occupied only by the idea that his prisoner was escaping, pinned him to the earth with a lance thrust, which gave him the escape he sought. No satisfaction was to be got out of a corpse insensible to taunt and insult; so the soldiers left it in the road where it lay. And the next morning it was found by the monks of St. Salvi, who buried it in their cemetery.\*

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The defeat and death of this remarkable man produced a lull in the dissensions of the city for awhile. So profound and unusual a tranquillity did Florence enjoy for the next year and a half or more, that it was only broken by two little wars;—one undertaken to assist the Pope in a quarrel he had with the Venetians, as the price of the absolution of the city from all censures and excommunications;† and the other engaged in against Arezzo, simply, as it would seem, at the request of the small town of Citta di Castello. Both these small matters were successfully concluded; notwithstanding that in the fight against Arezzo, the republic was measured against Ugucione della Fagiuola, who had risen into the reputation of one of the

\* Villani, book viii. chap. 96; Ammirato, book iv. Gonf. 92.

† Villani, book viii. chap. 115; Ammirato, book v. Gonf. 101.



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greatest captains of his age ; and Florence was at leisure to receive with all due honour her hired captain, the Duke of Calabria, who had, since she had last seen anything of him, become by his father's death a king. It will be remembered how this Duke of Calabria, at the siege of Pistoia, had thought more of saving his soul from the excommunications of Pope Clement than of earning the hire he was receiving from the Florentines ; and how the citizens, little heeding such theological troubles themselves, thought him a shabby fellow for his squeamishness. But now he was returning from Avignon a crowned king with his bride, and Florence was minded to forget that little matter of unearned wages, and let bygones be bygones. He arrived in the city on the 30th of September, 1310, and was received in one of the palaces of the Peruzzi in the Borgo di Greci.\* Two curious entries in the ancient books of the great banking firm, which are still extant, bear amusing testimony to the extent of the preparation made to receive the royal guest. The first, under the date of 15th November, 1310, records a payment of 450 lire made on account of a new kitchen constructed especially for the occasion, outside the city wall, to which, on the inside, the Peruzzi palaces were contiguous. We must suppose, therefore, that a door of communication was permitted to be opened in the city wall for this occasion. The second entry, dated 17th September, 1313, mentions a payment of 37 lire for putting into order the ground on which the kitchen had been built, "when King Robert came to us."

Though ardent lovers of equality, prizing it unhappily more highly than real liberty, the mercantile Florentines had to no small degree the *bourgeois* foible of exceeding admiration for any scrap of incarnated royalty, and were

\* Villani, book ix. chap. 8.

never better pleased than when they had an opportunity of doing the honours of their city, and showing their magnificence to any guest of that peculiar and privileged caste, with which they were at the same time so proud of having no closer connection. And the kings, and the princes, and the cardinals, and all sorts of more or less anointed and sacred heads, were apt to be very condescending and affable when they came among the wealthy merchants and money-dealers of the first banking city of Europe. Those Peruzzi hosts of the king—" *quei della pera*,"\* as Dante calls them, whose blood, as far as that goes, was flowing in noble Roman veins, at a time when the forefathers of their royal host were long-haired barbarians hunting their precarious food in nameless forests,—those Peruzzi burghers, who felt so much honoured by receiving him, were then able to buy up him, and his court, and all his revenues, which King Robert felt to be much more to the purpose. So Florence put on her best gala dress, and there were tilts and tournaments and banquets, and the ledgers and accounts, some of which it would not have been civil to obtrude on the royal guest's notice, were swept away out of sight into the counting-houses. There was "a little outstanding account of moneys advanced by our firm to your Majesty's royal father, two hundred thousand golden florins,† paid into his royal hand at Naples by our Neapolitan agent, Catilino Aldobrandini." This little matter was not forgotten, probably, by the magnificent banker host, at that time, as the fact that the money was never repaid has not been forgotten by the banker's descendants to the present day. But doubtless no such recollections were allowed to mar the festivity of the occasion. Every-

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\* "Those of the pear." Three pears are the canting arms of the *Peruzzi*.

† 25,000 ounces of pure gold. The record of the transaction may still be read in the ledgers of the firm, in the possession of the *Peruzzi* of the present day.

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1310. body said every thing that was agreeable. And if, as may be supposed, some little curling of the lip or smiling criticism marked the estimation in which the noble and professional soldiers in the monarch's retinue regarded the display of burgher horsemanship in the tilting-ground, they must have at least admitted that the appointments and caparisons of man and horse were of a magnificence that might move the envy of many a high-born cavalier, and no doubt kept their criticisms for each other's ears. One point in which the affable condescension of the high and puissant seigneurs, whom Florence frequently delighted to honour within her walls, shone forth with special brilliancy, was their perfect readiness to receive large presents in hard cash, which the good citizens naïvely tendered them in their ignorance of courtly habits and breeding. Notwithstanding the little account of wages drawn for service, which had not been rendered, and that other matter of the unpaid loan to his father, the good citizens, playing the part of some worthy uncle taking leave of a scapegrace nephew at his own door, did not omit to put a heavy "tip" into his Majesty's hand\* at parting with him, which was forthwith pocketed. And though I cannot assert that the circumstance is absolutely registered in the chronicles, I think I am justified in saying that his Majesty thrust his royal tongue into his cheek, and winked at some noble gold—or other—stick in waiting, as he did so.

It was not, however, merely because Florence lay in King Robert's way from Avignon to Naples, or for the sake of paying his good friends and late paymasters the Florentines a visit, that the king remained in that city from the 30th of September to the 24th of the following October. There was a serious matter to be talked over between the king and his hosts, which was of grave importance to both of them.

\* Villani, book ix. chap. 8.



Henry of Luxembourg had been elected King of the Romans, at Francfort, in 1308, crowned at Aix-la-Chapelle in 1309, and was about to march into Italy as Emperor, in 1310. There had been no Emperor in Italy since Frederick the Second ; and now the approach of one who was heralded by a high reputation for ability, statesmanship, valour, and enterprise, and who, moreover, was understood to have conceived large and high hopes of making the imperial authority in Italy something very different from the empty name which it had been for so many generations, was well calculated to rouse and call into activity a whole host of hopes and fears in every part of the peninsula. Of course there was not in any one of the fortress towers which still lurked among the Apennines, and bristled thickly in some parts of Italy, a single old wrecked and worn-out Ghibelline noble, poverty-stricken and helpless for many a year, who did not bless the day that brought such news, and sing his "*Nunc dimittis*" in the full persuasion that the good old time was coming back, that the Cæsar should enjoy his own again, and every gentleman, as a natural consequence, be restored to his proper position in a world which had too long been turned topsy-turvy. Of course there was not a city which had thrust out its Ghibellines that did not look to the imperial advent with fear, or one hardly treated by Guelphic enemies which did not brighten with hope. Of course the Bianchi, who had during the period of their exile well-nigh learned to be thorough-going Ghibellines, now became such more avowedly than ever. And Florence, with her old Guelph reputation, Guelph prejudices, sympathies, and habits, with her powerful and numerous body of Ghibellinizing exiles,—of course Florence had, perhaps more than any other city in Italy, reason to look with anxiety to the imperial coming. It was necessarily a subject of great anxiety also to the King of Naples, whose kingdom had been acquired

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1310. by means and was held by a title not at all likely to obtain the imperial recognition.

Under these circumstances, the more serious objects of King Robert's visit to Florence will be easily understood. The Neri party, as has been seen, were much divided among themselves. Enmities as bitter as those which existed between them and the Bianchi had sprung up between several of the Guelph families in the city. And it was a great object with Robert to reconcile these quarrels, and bring about a state of unanimity and concord, so absolutely necessary if Florence was to serve as a bulwark against the imperial forces and designs. But all his efforts to this end were vain; "so completely did the Neri, blinded by ambition and by the jealousies which had arisen among them, show themselves deaf to all good advice; in such sort that they would in all probability have ruined the Commonwealth, as they had ruined themselves, had not the public interests been cared for with the utmost zeal by the men of the people who were at the head of the government."\*

Among all the vivid and vehement hopes and fears which were excited in many hearts by the great tidings of the new Emperor's coming, there was one man more deeply moved, perhaps, than any other in Italy by the prospect, whose feelings and opinions on the subject will be more interesting to the English reader five hundred years after all the actors in that busy scene have passed away, than those of all the millions of his contemporaries. Dante,—consuming his heart in exile, eating the bitter bread of charity, and dragging his weary limbs up the stairs of foreign princes,—how did the great tidings sound to him?

To Dante the Emperor came as a deliverer, as a bright

\* Ammirato, book v. Conf. 104.

and sudden hope, when all other hope had failed. He was excited to the highest pitch of enthusiasm at the prospect, and hailed the Cæsar's arrival as the one and sufficient remedy for all the evils under which Italy was suffering. And this vehement imperial partisanship has fixed on him the title of "the Great Ghibelline" for many a subsequent generation. Yet it will have been seen how far Dante was from meriting such a title at the time when he left Florence. The Bianchi, with whom he was politically associated, and on whose behalf he proceeded as ambassador to Rome, were, as has been shown, no Ghibellines *then*; and Dante, eager only for reconciliation, order, and national progress, was assuredly no more Ghibelline than they. But perhaps exile, which no man ever felt more sorely, had produced its effect on him too, as well as on others of the party. That he was longingly anxious to avail himself of any chance of returning to his country, even that of bending his pride to send humble and pathetic appeals and entreaties to the government of the Neri, is well known.\* And he welcomed with passionate eagerness the hope that the establishment of the imperial supremacy in Italy, in far more perfect form, and to far more practical purpose, than it had ever existed there since the fall of the Western Empire, and the consequent destruction of the existing government of Florence, might open to him a path of return to his native city.

But it is insisted, especially by more recent students of the great Florentine's works and political career and character, that his was not the vulgar Ghibellinism, which bound Italian torydom to its feudal chief; that his desire to see the establishment of the imperial supremacy was not only compatible with the noblest and purest views of a patriotism far larger and more enlightened in its scope

\* See Misserini, *Vita di Dante*, chaps. 23, 24, 26, and 29.



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than the narrow municipal predilections which constituted the patriotism of his contemporaries; but was in truth a far-sighted and statesmanlike perception of the real and only means by which the independence and well-being not of Florence or of Tuscany only, but of Italy could be secured. We are told that his conception was, in a word, a re-establishment of the Empire of the West in such sort that Italy should not be the outlying province of a German power, but the exact reverse be the case.

It cannot be disputed, that there was much in the state of Italy that pointed to such a panacea for the evils which were destroying her; and that there were circumstances which seemed to mark the moment as favourable for such a revolution. The Papacy was transplanted to France; and its absence made the imagined change more feasible as well as more necessary. The new Emperor was a man capable of such a conception, and such an ambition, and is by some supposed to have in fact conceived it.

Nevertheless I fear me, that those, who think they see the looming form of such a political conception in the records that remain to us of Dante's words and deeds at that period, are deceived by the shadows of modern notions thrown on that dim background by the strong light of recent hopes and theories. I am not insensible to the temptation of finding, that the aspirations, which appear to be at last about to be realised, have been shared by the greatest Italian minds, and that the heroisms of the present are but carrying into effect the unchanging programme of an equally heroic past. But I cannot see that such a theory is warranted by the text of the documents which bear upon the subject. I find no point that can serve as the foundation for such an hypothesis in the very remarkable letters written by him to the Emperor and to the Florentines. There are passages in the letter, it is true, which indicate a conception of Italian unity in the writer's

mind; but none which would go to show that this was connected in his thought with the idea of Italian independence. And in the letters to Henry there are phrases and passages which very unmistakably prove that the Empire of which Dante was dreaming would not have been such an organisation of the European world as would have guaranteed to Italy any such position in the vast scheme, as should have justified Florence in throwing into the Medea-cauldron the framework of the liberties she had acquired, however unsatisfactory the present working trim of them might have been.

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“Do you feel,” he writes to the Florentines, “no dread and terror of the second death towards which you are rushing, since you the first, and you alone,\* in contempt of the salutary restraint which true liberty imposes, burst forth into violence against the King of the Romans, *the monarch of the world*; since you, basing your resistance on false and pernicious principles, refuse to render to him that homage *which he has the right to exact*, and prefer rather to rush into the fury of *rebellion*, than to bow your necks to due submission? Would you, at the instigation of such mad thoughts, separate yourselves, like a new Babylon, from the kindly Empire, and make an attempt to establish new thrones, so that there should be one Florentine and one Roman Empire? Go your way then, and, envious as you have shown yourselves already of the Apostolical unity, do your best to break this other unity also!” †

We have here exhortation to *unity*, it is true, but it was to be a unity of “*due submission*” to “the monarch of the world.” The Florentines were to feel themselves guilty of “*rebellion*” in that they refused submission, which the Emperor “had the right to exact,”—the only

\* This was not so. Venice and Genoa equally refused to submit themselves to the Emperor.

† Misserini, Vita di Dante, chap. 29.

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The rest of his letter consists merely of threats and warnings of the sufferings likely to arise from a war with the imperial forces.

Dante wished, says his able biographer,\* “to unite all Italy under a great protector; a profound idea, than which nothing better could be found, taking into consideration the position and the division of the peninsula. And justice must be done to the poet, if he spoke with such assurance and trust, since it was impossible to find any more efficacious means of reuniting and tranquillising Italy, than the strong hand of Henry and of an Emperor.”

It is true that the world had not yet received all the repeated lessons which have at length taught it that

“In native swords and native ranks  
The only hope of freedom dwells!”

It is true that mankind had not yet been edified by the study of the results of unity under a Charles V., or of the tranquillity born to a saviour of society from the cannon-storm of a 2nd of December. The world has had many such lessons since Dante’s time, and, though slow of study, has at length, we may hope, learnt them. But there were hearts in Florence five hundred years ago to which, despite the troubles and evil around them, that proposal of quietude under the “strong hand” of a German “protector” was not acceptable; and it would have satisfied the craving of our hero-worship better to have read that Dante was of the number.

Much may be forgiven to one whose life had been wrecked as that of Dante had been, the genuine and enlightened patriotism of whose early years had been

\* Misserini, *Vita di Dante*, chap. 29.



rewarded by proscription and condemnation to the stake and faggot, and to whom the keen anguish of his country's injustice and the pangs of exile were intolerable as they were to the high-wrought sensibilities of his poet nature. But it is impossible, I think, to read the following passages from the second of the letters above referred to,—that written to the Emperor,—without feeling that it is the exile speaking from out of the bitter indignation of his heart, who writes, and that any “strong hand” by which he and his might have been triumphantly brought back to their country would have appeared acceptable and beneficent to him.

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He writes to urge the Emperor not to lose his time in subjecting cities, and crushing rebellion in other parts of Italy, but to march at once on Florence.

“I who write to thee,” the letter runs, “in my own name as well as in that of the others,\* saw thee † such as becomes the imperial majesty, most benignant, and heard from thee words of utmost clemency, when my hands touched thy feet, and my lips paid their debt, when my spirit exulted in thee, and I said in my heart, ‘Behold the Lamb of God! behold him who taketh away the sins of the world!’ But we marvel that, having conquered in Lombardy, thou delayest so long at a distance from Tuscany, abandoning and forgetting it. For if thou thinkest to defend the rights of the Empire by confining thyself to the boundaries of Liguria, thou art, as we judge, in error. *For the sovereignty of the Romans is not bounded by the frontiers of Italy nor by the limits of three-angled Europe.* \* \* \* \* Thou madest long delay in Milan; and is it thought that the infinitely poisonous Hydra can be killed by cutting off the heads of it? But

\* The Ghibelline party throughout Italy.

† Dante had had a personal interview with Henry shortly after his arrival in Italy.

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if thou bearest in mind the great and glorious deeds of Alcides, thou wilt see that thou art deceived, even as he was, by that pestilential beast with its ever-sprouting heads, until that magnanimous hero attacked the principle of its life. When thou hast bent the proud neck of Cremona, dost thou imagine that Brescia will not blaze out into sudden fury, or Pavia? Assuredly they will. What then? Mayhap thou, most excellent prince, from the summit of the altitude on which thou art placed, dost not perceive that the fox which causes all this stench hides itself secure from the hunters? Certainly it is not in the turbid Po, nor in your Tiber, that the fraudulent beast drinks! No? They are the waters of the Arno that it poisons with its pestilence! And Florence, if thou knowest it not already, is the name by which this raging pestilence is called. This is the viper nestled in the breast of its own mother! This is the sick sheep which by its contact infects the whole flock of its lord! This is the impious and infamous Myrrha who burns in the embraces of her own father! Arise then, noble offspring of Isaiah, and take confidence in thyself from the eyes of thy Lord, the God of Sabaoth; and lay low this Goliath with the sling of thy wisdom and the stone of thy strength! For by his fall, dark shade and the night of fear shall fall upon the army of the Philistines. That army will fly, and Israel shall return again to Liberty.”\*

Is this the letter of a statesman working to large ends of a far-seeing policy? Can we find anything in these furious utterances save the maddened rage and hatred of an unjustly treated man against the government and the party which has oppressed and wronged him; and a burning, unquenchable desire to use every and any means for avenging his wrongs, and reinstating himself in his

\* Misserini, chap. 30.

home, and in his honoured position in that home? I cannot believe that if Henry had come into Italy while Dante was still a member of the government in Florence, and when he went to Rome anxious to avert from his native city the curse of a foreign intervention, he would have equally welcomed the project of Italian unity to be achieved by universal submission to a foreign sovereign. Not that Dante was acting or speaking one word in opposition to the dictates of his conscience. But we know what exile does for men, and the sort of education it never fails to indoctrinate them with ; especially banishment from a free city, whose misused freedom has wronged the exile. A. D.  
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It is only the surpassing interest that belongs to the name and character of Dante, and not any importance attaching to the events in question themselves, that can justify me in having dwelt on them thus at length. For in truth the descent of the Emperor Henry of Luxembourg into Italy belongs more, as regards any results that flowed from it, to the great history of the "things that might have been," than to the narrative of what has been. A brief glance at the former speculative domain is sufficient to busy the imagination with a whole host of probable consequences, which would have wholly changed the entire course of Italian history from that point forwards, had the career of Henry of Luxembourg not been cut short prematurely. As it was, his whole story forms but a slightly connected episode in the history of the time, as regards Italy at least ; —its most permanently interesting feature being the part which Dante was induced to play in it.

While the Emperor was yet in the north of Italy, he despatched messengers to Florence requiring the Florentines to send ambassadors to his coronation as accepting his suzerainty, and bidding them forthwith cease from war against Arezzo, then the main head-quarters of the Ghibellines. The Signory having heard the messengers,



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appointed another day for giving them an answer, and in the meantime entrusted the task of doing so to Betto Brunelleschi. And the answer he gave was a remarkable one. His whole speech, says the historian,\* went to show that “the Emperor could not be permitted to use such an imperious tone to them, seeing that *the Florentines had nothing to do with him*;—that if the Emperor, looking back to the past and to the ancient rights of the Empire, pretended to draw from these a title to the sovereignty of Tuscany, and thought on this ground to disturb and upset the rights of states, the Tuscans by a similar line of reasoning claimed the sovereignty of that country as the descendants of their Etruscan ancestors, who possessed and ruled the land from one sea to the other, not only before a Cæsar had founded the Roman Empire, but long before the Roman Republic had stretched its dominions beyond the limits of the territory around the city.” The imperialism which led Dante to be willing to lay Italy at the feet of a foreign lord is excused by modern Italians on the ground, that the inheritance of the old Roman Empire by the German Emperors of the middle ages was so universally recognised a portion of the political creed of the times, that it could not occur to any man to deny the existence of it at least *de jure*. But here was a man of a different mould of mind! And he spoke the sentiments of the general Florentine heart. That he spoke the true sentiments of his countrymen is proved by their determination to act in accordance with them. But it is curious to find, that they were, nevertheless, not prepared to state them thus boldly. The audacity of Brunelleschi startled his fellow-citizens as much as it offended the ambassadors. His speech was disavowed, and the ambassadors were requested to attend the Signory another day,

\* Ammirato, book v. Gonf. 106.

when their real sentiments should be better expressed to them. Messer Ugolino Tornaquinci was named as spokesman at this time, and he made a long harangue in due diplomatic style, full of an abundance of courteous phrases which meant nothing, and in substance civilly declining to comply with either of the Emperor's behests. A.D.  
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This curious incident is notable as giving us the exact measure of the relationship between the Emperor and the free cities, especially Florence, the freest of them all. The "*magni nominis umbra*" of the Empire did exercise an influence over men's minds yet ;—an influence by no means sufficient to prevent their thorough and entire determination to be and act in perfect freedom from any subjection to the Emperor ; but yet sufficient to frighten them when they heard their practice erected into a theory, and to prevent them from saying what they both felt and meant.

Henry was crowned at Rome on the 29th of June, 1312, having avoided Florence on his journey thither. In October he sent new ambassadors to the Florentines. But the Signory hearing of their approach sent orders to La Lastra, which they had reached on their way to the city, forbidding them to advance, and commanding them to quit the Florentine territory. And on their refusing or delaying to obey, they were attacked and robbed by some Florentine ruffians, who compelled them to fly for their lives,—not, says Villani,\* without the secret connivance of the Signory. In November the Emperor, having returned from Rome to the north of Italy, again without coming near Florence, and being then at Genoa, formally cited the Florentines to appear before him ; and on the 24th of December condemned them as rebels against the Empire, compelling, at the same time, all the Florentine merchants in Genoa to quit the city, and confiscating all their property.

\* Book ix. chap. 26.

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It became now sufficiently evident that there must be war between the great Guelph city and the Emperor at no distant day ; and Florence set herself to prepare for the struggle by all possible means. She adopted the wise measure of amnestying and recalling all her exiles, except such as their decided Ghibelline predilection would have made a source of weakness rather than of strength. Dante, for example, was expressly exempted from the act of amnesty. His special worshippers complain, somewhat unreasonably, it seems to me, of this exclusion, and write of the "eternal disgrace" \* resulting thence to the city. Certainly the political dissension which separated such a man from his fellow-citizens in person and in heart was a grave misfortune to both parties, and a lasting one to the latter. But could any rational man expect, or advise, if he had been then and there present, that at such a crisis, when the city was straining every nerve to defend itself against the expected attack of the imperial forces, the man should be invited within its walls who had written the letters to the Florentines and the Emperor?

The third circuit of the walls, which had been left till this time in some parts incomplete, was put into perfect order, and fortified with additional palisades. At the same time news was brought by a secret but sure channel, that Pisa had sent the Emperor sixty thousand golden florins, and the promise of sixty thousand more as soon as he should appear in Tuscany with his army. Of course the Florentines knew well enough that all this gold was both a bribe and a means for Henry to attack them ; and they redoubled their preparations for resistance. They added a new draft of a thousand horsemen to the city forces, and gave commissions to trusty persons to engage beyond the limits of the State a still larger number. They assigned

\* Misserini, chap. 31.



to "men adapted to this service the care of finding money;"\* and they formed various new alliances, especially one with the Paduans. A.D.  
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While Florence was thus intently occupied and anxious, and all thoughts as well as all hands were busy with the cares so urgently needed, there occurred in the city one of those strangely picturesque incidents, which, though mere isolated episodes influencing in no wise the progress of that national life of which a historian is the biographer, yet contribute more to assist a reader in forming for himself a graphic picture of the social life of a long past epoch, than many a more politically important record.

The circumstances of Corso Donati's death will be remembered; and the reader has yet more recently made acquaintance with brave, bluff Betto Brunelleschi, the uncourtly spokesman who so undiplomatically told the truth to the Emperor's ambassadors. Well! It so happened that Messer Betto, one of the most indignant in the city, as we can well understand him to have been, at Corso Donati's suspected designs of usurping despotic power, was prominent, if not the chief, among those who accused him and hunted him to his death. And on him accordingly the sons and other relatives of Corso, "since they could not revenge themselves on an entire people,"† had determined to avenge the fate of their kinsman. For long months their hatred was impotent; for Brunelleschi was not a man to be easily surprised, or, when surprised, easily disposed of. But at length, in February, 1312, some assassins posted in ambush succeeded in killing him. "The city," says the historian, "was much disturbed at the news as soon as it became known; and without any doubt a new civil war would have arisen from this cause had it not been that anxiety about the approach of the Emperor

\* Ammirato, book v. Gonf. 107.

† Ammirato, book v. Gonf. 110.

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preoccupied the minds of the citizens.” The picturesque part of the matter, however, was what followed. Corso had been hurriedly buried, it will be remembered, by the monks of San Salvi, without any funeral honours or ceremonies befitting the rank of such a citizen. But his family had felt that the time was not come for offering more fitting obsequies to his memory till his death had been avenged. Now that a victim had fallen, they might venture to do this. So all the family marched out to San Salvi, with a large force of armed retainers, to celebrate the funeral. Guards were placed at the doors of the church, and armed men took possession of every part of the convent, to provide against surprise either by the friends of Brunelleschi, or by the officers of justice, while the Donati disinterred the corpse and caused a funeral service to be performed. “with great lamentation, and pomp of torches, and funeral ceremonies,\* just as if Corso had died but the day before.” The scene presents itself to the imagination as a sufficiently characteristic one. By the side of the public road, at the doors of the convent church, which stands there still, though the monks have long been away—the fierce armed figures of the Donati retainers—men, we may suppose, who had followed the fallen leader in many a hard day’s fight—grimly stood on guard with their weapons in their hands. Within, the frightened monks were busily engaged, under the compulsion of other armed figures, in their strange task of disturbing the old warrior in his resting-place, and in preparing for the solemn ceremony they were required to perform. When this had been completed, and the body a second time consigned to the grave, the armed members of the family and their followers marched defiantly back into the city, with consciences satisfied and feelings soothed by

\* Ammirato, book v. Conf. 110.

the murder and the religious act following it, which they had accomplished. A.D.  
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Although Henry had not been in a hurry to come to extremities with Florence, nay had indeed, as we have seen, incurred the blame and objurgations of the Ghibellines for his delay in doing so, and had made every effort to induce the Signory to yield without coming to the arbitrament of arms, it was quite evident that, if the Florentines would not yield, the struggle must come. At length, returning northwards from Rome in September, 1313, the Emperor led his army into the immediate vicinity of Florence, but did not think himself strong enough to storm the city. It was the opinion of Villani, that had he done so, he might probably have taken it. His troops, however, and especially the Florentine exiles who were in the army, preferred to employ the time in making predatory excursions on all sides, laying waste the country, every field and building of which they well knew, and knew to whom it belonged; and thus gratifying their personal hatreds, and deferring the more dangerous task of assaulting the walls.

But this delay was fatal to the Emperor's chance of taking the city. The people within armed themselves *en masse*, with the Bishop and clergy and the Gonfalonieri of the different wards at their head. An irresistible enthusiasm and indignation took possession of all classes at the sight of the wanton mischief inflicted on the country by the exiles and the soldiery. And in the mean time came in reinforcements from Siena, Pistoia, Prato, Volterra, Colle, Samminiato—(no longer save in name, "*dei Tedeschi*")—and Bologna. For fifty days\* the Emperor remained at San Salvi, where, coming from Arezzo to about the distance of a mile from the walls, he established his head-

\* Macchiavelli, book ii. ad ann. 1312.



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quarters, without venturing to attack the city. On the night of the last day of October, being unwell at the time,\* he gave up all hope of being able to take the city, burned his camp, and withdrew his army to San Casciano, on the route to Siena, where he remained till the 7th of January, 1313, laying waste the country, and doing much mischief. From thence he went to Poggibonzi, where he remained till the 6th of March, his army suffering much the while from scarcity of food and sickness. He was continually harassed moreover by the Florentines on one side, and by the Sienese on the other, as also by a small force belonging to King Robert of Naples, which was stationed in his immediate neighbourhood at Colle.† In fact he suffered so much, and his army was so seriously diminished by these causes, that when he withdrew thence to Pisa, in the spring, his retreat was very much like a flight. He was very hardly pressed moreover for money, and would have had absolutely none, had not the envoys of King Frederick of Sicily, who came to make a league with him against Robert of Naples, brought him from their master twenty thousand doubloons.

“ Having paid his debts with these,” says Villani,‡ “ he left Poggibonzi, and without stopping, returned to Pisa on the 9th of March, in a very bad condition, both he himself and his army. But Henry had this great quality in him, that he was never disturbed by adversity, nor rendered vainglorious by prosperity.”

The Emperor remained at Pisa till the 5th of August, and employed the time in recruiting his army and preparing for a new campaign ; but not against Florence. He determined, says Villani,§ “ not to come to blows with the Florentines, nor with others of the Tuscans ; seeing that he had advanced his cause little by doing so, but had

\* Villani, book ix. chap. 47.

† Villani, book ix. chap. 48.

‡ Book ix. chap. 49.

§ Book ix. chap. 51.

rather weakened himself than otherwise. His plan now was to entirely renovate his forces, and attack King Robert with all his strength, and take from him the kingdom of Naples, believing that if he could succeed in doing that, he would make himself master of all Italy. And assuredly so it would have been, if God had not found a remedy.” A.D.  
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On the 5th of August, the Emperor left Pisa, and marched with all his army by the Val d' Elsa towards Siena; attempting and failing, most unaccountably as it seems at the present day, to take Castel-fiorentino, a little town, or village rather, on the Elsa, which looks to the passer-by on the railway from Empoli to Siena, as if a corporal's guard would be abundantly sufficient to secure its submission. Passing beneath the walls of Siena, from one of the gates of which the Sienese were tempted to make a sortie, which was repulsed by the Imperial troops with much loss to the city forces, he pitched his camp on the already storied field of Montaperti, on the Arbia. There he was taken ill; \* or rather became more ill; for the fact would seem to be that he had never entirely recovered since he was seized with illness at San Salvi in the previous autumn. Leaving the camp at Montaperti, he went to some thermal baths, in great reputation in those days, at Macereto, on the river Merse, about fourteen miles to the south-west of Siena, on the road to Grosseto. But obtaining no benefit from them, he went thence to the monastery of Buonconvento, which is twelve miles to the south of Siena, on the road to Rome; and there died on the 24th of August, 1313.

Rarely has any death caused such vivid and wide-spread joy and sorrow, as this of Henry of Luxembourg. To Dante it was the final quenching in dark night of all the

\* Villani, book ix. chap. 52.

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light and the hope of the world,—the prevalence of the powers of darkness over the principle of good; the irremediable downfall not only of all his personal hopes, but of a whole world of theories, schemes, and aspirations for the future of Italy and mankind. To the Ghibellines throughout Italy it was a sudden death-blow to a thousand ambitions and expectations, and to such of them as were in exile it dashed from their lips the cup of hope, and re-consigned them to despair. To the Guelph cities, to Florence above all, and to her kingly ally, Robert, it was indeed a great and timely deliverance. It had been the general opinion that the latter would not have ventured to await the attack which the Emperor was about to lead against him, but would have taken ship, abandoned his Neapolitan kingdom, and escaped to his county of Provence. And then there would have been no other possibility in prospect, but that all Italy should fall into Henry's power. For Florence could not have resisted alone the force, which he would then have been able to bring against her.

But all these things belong, as has been said, to the history of what might have been.

The army which the Emperor had collected, mostly of Italian Ghibellines, broke up and dispersed. The Pisans who were among them, and who had, according to the traditional and immemorial policy and feeling of Pisa, been his especial supporters since his descent into Italy, carried his body to Pisa, and buried it with all royal honours in the cathedral there.

It was a matter almost of course that such a death, the object of so much rejoicing and so much regret, should in those days be attributed to poison. Medical science was little able to say why any sick man died, and was wholly unable to decide whether or not he had been poisoned. The practice of poisoning was common, and the suspicion of it was therefore of course universal. In this case the



story went, that a Dominican monk had been suborned by the Florentines to murder his Imperial penitent with a poisoned wafer in administering the Eucharist to him. The tale, which does not appear to have obtained any credit even at the time, was probably a mere Ghibelline invention; and the perfectly authenticated statements respecting the Emperor's failing health during the whole of the previous year make it quite needless to seek any further for the causes of his death.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

Causes of the ill-success of the Florentine popular government—Ghibellinism encouraged by the Emperor's presence—Lordship of the city offered to Robert of Naples—Pisa hires troops and puts them under the command of Uguccione della Faggiuola—His character—Peace between the Tuscan cities—Uguccione will not observe the peace—He makes himself Lord of Lucca—Effect of this on Florence—King Robert sends his brother Pietro Conte di Gravina to Florence as General of the Armies of the Commonwealth—Character of Pietro—Uguccione prepares for war—The Valdicivola—Position of Montecatini—The armies meet beneath that town—King Robert sends another brother, the Prince of Taranto, to aid the Florentines—Preparations for battle—Battle of Montecatini—Death of the Conte di Gravina—Defeat of the Florentines—How Florence bore the blow—King Robert sends his brother-in-law Beltramo del Bulzo to the Florentines—He is not well received—The Signory fail to obtain another General from France, or Germany—Creation of the "Bargello" Lando of Gubbio—His atrocious tyranny—King Robert names Guido di Battifolla as his Vicar—His character—Is unable to check the abominations of the Bargello—They are at length put an end to by means of representations to King Robert—The Interminelli rise against Uguccione in Lucca—Castruccio Castracane—Uguccione loses both Lucca and Pisa—Castracane made Lord of Lucca.

THE great danger, from which Florence had escaped only by the untimely death of the Emperor Henry, ought to have served the Florentines as a lesson and a warning of the absolute necessity of putting an end to their civil discords. They had fully appreciated the greatness of the danger, and were proportionably exultant at the unexpected event which had relieved them from it. But the leaders of the Florentine factions were incorrigible. Yet harder lessons were in store for them; but they remained incorrigible to the end. The story of the Floren-

time Commonwealth and of its memorable fall has been again and again appealed to by the adversaries of democratic forms of constitution as a notable confirmation of the truth of their theories of the necessary instability of all government based on the will of the people. But those who would draw such conclusions from the course of Florentine history, have read that history wrong. As far as we have yet proceeded, the moments of brightest hope for the future of the Commonwealth have been those when, during the transitory abeyance and impotence of the leaders of both contending factions, the management of affairs fell into the hands of the veritable people. The nearest approach to sound principles of constitutional government was made by them. Florence fell, it has been said, despite the ardent patriotism of her citizens, because her government was a democracy. The statement is profoundly erroneous. The gross want of patriotism among her leading men was fatal to her ;—again and again all but fatal, and finally utterly fatal. True, these men, Guelphs and Ghibellines, Bianchi and Neri, loved Florence, were proud of her greatness, and ready to give of their substance or of their blood to secure it. They loved Florence, but they loved revenge on, and ascendancy over, their political adversaries far better. The two loves were not compatible, and they deliberately again and again gave the preference to the latter. Either faction was prepared at any moment to prefer the rule of a foreigner to that of the party in opposition to them. That this was so is unhappily but too patent throughout the whole course of the history. And let any Englishman allow his mind to dwell for half a moment on the estimate that would be formed among ourselves of the patriotism of a worsted and ousted political party, which should seek foreign aid to vanquish and ruin its opponents ! No ; the Florentine party leaders failed in patriotism. They hated

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their adversaries within the city walls far more bitterly than they hated any foreign foe. They loved their party far more truly than they loved their country.

In the extremity of their need and danger some steps had been made, as we have seen, towards a partial reconciliation between the party in power and the exiles. But no sooner was that danger past, than fresh struggles between the great Guelph and Ghibelline parties without the walls, and fresh minor quarrels between different factions of the Guelph party within the walls, plunged the city into new misfortunes in the present, and prepared the way for yet worse organic mischiefs in the immediate future.

Of course the recent events, the presence of the Emperor in Italy, his schemes and hopes, and the yet larger schemes and hopes that his coming had given rise to in more fervent and less practical minds than his own, had tended to make Italian Ghibellinism more Ghibelline than it had become during the long absence of any emperor from Italy. The stream of social progress, which had forced forward the old feudal Ghibellines into tory-minded citizens, could not be so driven backwards as to resuscitate the old ideas and desires which had first been known under that name. There could be no longer any question of overriding, and as it were ignoring cities, and city life, and citizens, or of making an independent and hostile life concurrent with their life. Ghibelline ambitions were civic ambitions now. But the recent hope and effort had consolidated the party, and renewed, and made real, instead of merely legendary, its connection with and dependence on the Emperor. Nevertheless, there was so little of real political diversity of opinions and ideas between the Ghibellines and their adversaries, and so much of mere personal enmity, and longing desire to be restored to their homes, that even now, if there had been enough

of real patriotism in Florence, and of intelligent perception of the needs of the Commonwealth, to have induced the ruling party in the city to have made the Emperor's death an opportunity for recalling and amnestying their exiles of all sorts, the Ghibellinism of them would have been no danger to the State. They would have been Florentine citizens, and not Imperial subjects, to all intents and purposes. And Florence, united within herself, and able to exert her whole strength against any attack from without, need not have feared all that the Ghibellinism of other cities could have done against her.

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But there was no such amount of virtue or wisdom within the city ; and the city went on its way towards its ruin accordingly.

Already in June, a month or two before the Emperor's death, Florence had offered the government of the city to King Robert for five years, which term was afterwards increased to eight. He was to send his vicar every six months, who was to rule the city without altering the constitution of the government, but in all other respects according to his own discretion.\*

In the meantime Pisa, which more than any other community had cause to lament the Emperor's death, and dread the consequences of it, endeavoured to provide against the dangers she foresaw by retaining in her pay a considerable number of the German and Flemish troops in the Imperial army. She had, however, some difficulty in finding a general to command them ; for it would seem that it was never for an instant contemplated to entrust the defence of the state to any native Pisan. In the first instance the city applied to Frederick, King of Sicily. But he had already enough trouble on his hands, by reason of the chronic state of warfare between him

\* Villani, book ix. chap. lvi. ; Ammirato, book v. Gonf. 123.

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1313. and King Robert of Naples, and declined the honour. Applications to the Duke of Savoy, and to Henry of Flanders, were equally unsuccessful. Thus disappointed, the Ghibelline city turned its eyes on Uguccione della Faggiuola, who has already been mentioned as a military adventurer from Romagna, whose valour and ability had acquired for him a great reputation. He had always been connected with the Ghibelline party, and the Emperor had appointed him his lieutenant in Genoa. By Henry's death, therefore, he was left disposable, and on the look-out for something to do, just when the Pisans were in search of a captain for their army. So a bargain was quickly struck between them; and Pisa was probably much better served than she would have been by either of the royal personages she had been anxious to take into her pay.

Uguccione della Faggiuola was certainly a remarkable man. Of herculean frame, and singularly expressive features, personally brave to excess, and habitually using arms heavier and larger than other men could wield, he was admirably fitted to acquire the respect and regard of his soldiers, and to be the popular hero of his citizen paymasters. Della Faggiuola had, however, more valuable qualities than these. He was a man of unbounded energy and activity, fertile in resource, and had shown himself a very competent master of the art of war.

"It was a wonderful thing," says Ammirato,\* "to see the sudden change in the appearance of things at Pisa, which his arrival occasioned." He brought with him a good band of troopers, formed by himself, and accustomed to fight under him as their leader. And with these, added to the forces Pisa had already gathered together, Uguccione decided on commencing hostilities at

\* Book v. Gonf. 126.



once, instead of waiting to be attacked. He had already regained several of the fortresses, which Lucca and Florence together had in old times taken from the Pisans, and was in the full course of success, when Pisa was induced to join Florence, Siena, and Lucca in sending ambassadors to King Robert for the arrangement of peace, which was in fact concluded between all these cities on the twenty-sixth of March, 1314. A.D.  
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But such a peace, however much for the interests of the merchants of Pisa, was not at all for the interests of their hired general Uguccone della Fagiuola. And as, being at the head of a mercenary army, no better pleased than its general to find its occupation gone, the power was irremediably in his hands, the Pisans found themselves in a position to be enlightened as to the consequences of hiring professional soldiers to fight their battles for them, instead of fighting them, if battles there must needs be, themselves. Despite the peace, Uguccone, at the head of his troops, continued to overrun the territory of Lucca, and pressed the city so hard, that the Lucchese, "to their infinite disgrace," says Ammirato,\* and, at all events, to the infinite disgust of the Florentines, were reduced to surrender at discretion, to give up to Pisa the castle of Ripafratta, a strong position between Lucca and Pisa (now a railroad station), and to consent to the re-admission into the city of the great Ghibelline family of the Interminelli, who had been long in exile.

In vain Florence protested that by the terms of the alliance between herself and Lucca, the latter had no right to give up towns or fortresses to the common enemy without the consent of her ally; and reminded the Lucchese that this very castle of Ripafratta had been taken from Pisa some sixty years ago by Florentine valour, and had

\* Book v. Gonf. 123.

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1314. been given by Florence to Lucca. The deed was done, and Lucca had no power to help it. So little power indeed had she to help herself, that very shortly after the admission of the Interminelli into the city, a conspiracy was organised between Uguccone and the members of that family, aided by the other leading Ghibellines of Lucca, by which the successful soldier of fortune was admitted, together with his soldiers, into the city, and the entire government given up into his hands.

The sudden and complete revolution thus accomplished, attended as it was by an amount of pillage and violence almost equivalent to a sacking of the city, and by the ruin and flight of a great number of the industrious artizans of Lucca, was felt as a great blow by Florence. In the words of the historian,\* “a very great dread and terror fell upon the Florentines,” when the tidings reached them. The alliance with Lucca had always been considered by the Florentine statesmen as the turn in the balance of power in Tuscany, which gave them the upper hand against Pisa. The calculation was, that Arezzo and Pisa were about an equal match for Florence and Siena; and that the alliance of Lucca with either of the two sides so constituted was sufficient to turn the scale in favour of the party which could secure her adherence. The revolution, which delivered the city into the power of Uguccone della Fagiuola, of course, bound her to the Pisan and Ghibelline interest; and the fears in Florence for the result of this were, as was soon seen, not without good grounds.

It is not the less true, however, that the violence, not less impolitic than cruel, which drove a large body of the skilled artizans of “*Lucca l' Industriosa*” from their homes, was eventually a source of quite incalculable profit

\* Ammirato, book v. Conf. 129.

to Florence, in exactly the same manner in which England was profited by the persecution which drove the skilful Huguenot silk weavers from their French homes to Spital-fields. It is curious that the industry imported with them by the fugitives was in this case also mainly the same ;—that of silk-workers. The silk trade received a check in Lucca, and an impetus in Florence, from that displacement of skill and industry, which reversed the relative positions of the two cities in this branch of industry and commerce, and secured the superiority to Florence for all the generations that have come and gone from that day to this.

The first step taken by the Florentine Signory on the fall of Lucca, was to send envoys to King Robert, charged to point out to him all the dangers that threatened the Guelph cause, in consequence of this disaster, and to beg him to send them immediate help. The King complied with the demand by despatching in all haste his youngest brother Pietro, Count of Gravina, at the head of three hundred horse, who arrived in Florence on the 18th of August, 1314. The Count of Gravina was a very young man, and not likely to be of much service as a general to oppose to such a warrior as Uguccione della Fagiola. But he was a prince and a foreigner ; and the Florentines as usual were delighted at his arrival, and received him with every possible manifestation of the most cordial welcome. “ Though very young, he was by nature prudent and discreet. He allowed no sign of the pride and haughtiness of royalty to appear in his intercourse with the citizens ; but behaved courteously to them ; and made it evident to all that, looking upon the interests of Florence as his own, he had acted with the utmost promptitude in turning his attention to their affairs. And to all these excellencies, or appearances of excellencies, he added the natural advantages of remarkable beauty both of face and person ; and in a short space so won the affections of the

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A.D. 1314. citizens, that it was thought that if he had lived, the Florentines would have conferred on him the lordship of their city for his life.”\*

The young prince began his exercise of power well and prudently by arranging a peace with Arezzo. He used also the invidious power, which had been entrusted to him, of nominating by his sole authority all the magistrates of the Commonwealth, judiciously, by placing in office a Signory which commanded the respect and adhesion of all classes in the city. Averardo de' Medici, great-great-grandfather of Cosmo *Pater Patriæ*, was named Gonfaloniere ; and in the list of the Priori we find, among other distinguished but less well-known names, those of Soderini and Giotto Peruzzi, the head of the great Peruzzi firm, and at that time probably the wealthiest merchant and banker in Europe.

Uguccione della Fagiuola, meanwhile, who, “holding Lucca on his own account, began to behave towards the Pisans themselves more after the fashion of a prince than of their hired captain,”† was not losing his time. He employed himself in preparing the way for more serious and vitally important hostilities by doing as much desultory mischief as he could to the territory of the enemy, making raids and incursions, burning farms, destroying crops, and capturing isolated fortresses, after the usual fashion of that day, which recognised no distinction between fighting and non-fighting classes of the population, which knew no other war-code than that which declared, that he who is not for us is against us, and which sought by every means to do all the evil possible to every one thus compendiously condemned, and to extend the horrors of warfare to as large a surface of the hostile territory as possible.

\* Ammirato, book v. Conf. 131.

† Ammirato, *loc. cit*

The Florentines on their part were pursuing a similar policy ; and succeeded in getting possession of almost all those outlying towns, castles, and portions of territory which Lucca held in the lower Valdarno, as Fucecchio, Montecalvi, Castelfranco, Montopoli, &c. They were active also on the other side of Lucca in the Val di Nievole, in which they captured Monsummano and Montecatini.

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If Tuscany be, as it has often been called, the garden of Italy, the Val di Nievole is the garden of Tuscany. The traveller, setting his face from Pistoia towards Lucca, begins his journey of some twenty-five miles by climbing a spur of the Apennine of no great height, which divides the Ombrone valley around Pistoia from that of the Nievole, and on which still stands the ancient castle of Serravalle, destined to defend this pass, so important in the wars of the period under review. The traveller indeed no longer climbs the height, but dashes through it, and under the ragged old towers of the castle, by a railway tunnel, and pays for the convenience by losing one of the most lovely views in Tuscany. The many-shaped hills and picturesquely-broken ground around him are richly covered with woods of oak, beech, and chestnut ; and the wonderful luxuriance of the valley beneath, stretching away to Lucca, teeming with corn and wine and oil, and fruits of every description, the earliest and the finest in Tuscany, and thickly studded with towns and villages, white glistening villas and grey church towers, laughs in the all-gilding sunshine, the very picture of peaceful industry, abounding plenty, and measureless content.

In the midst of this rarely spread scene of beauty and riches, down in the flat bottom of the valley, is the modern town of Montecatini, the Tuscan Cheltenham, with its white stone buildings,—pump-rooms, churches,

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hotels, bathing establishments—gathered around the health-giving springs, and shining out brightly among the green world in which it is embosomed. The waters were well known and much esteemed in the old Roman time. And the very frequent mention of gout in the mediæval chronicles, to an extent which would seem to indicate that the malady must have been more common in those days of activity than it is in these idler times in Tuscany, may perhaps indicate that they were more neglected than was wise in the mediæval centuries. This thermal establishment stands at the foot of the steep mountain side which shuts in the valley to the north-east. And high above it, on the crest of the mountain, is the old mediæval town of Montecatini, with its fragments of town-walls, and the towers of its own strong castles, one at either extremity of the long crescent-shaped line of buildings, which top the height. It makes a very imposing appearance even yet, as seen from the valley below it ; and in the fourteenth century was a very important and strong military position.

This fortress-town had been taken since the disaster at Lucca by the Florentine forces, as has been said ; and now Uguccone marched his army up the valley from Lucca to regain it. The enterprise was strategically a very important one ; and it soon became apparent that it would turn out to be the great struggle of the war. Uguccone came into the field with all his forces ; and Florence in alarm sent urgent messages to King Robert to despatch them more assistance. He would have wished, we are told, to send his son, the Duke of Calabria, with an important and well-organised force. But as the need was too urgent to admit of delay, he consented to the pressing entreaties of the Florentine envoys, that he would allow his brother, the Prince of Taranto, to go with a hastily raised force of five hundred horse. This



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prince, who had the reputation of being more brave and reckless than skilful or fortunate in war, arrived in Florence, bringing his son Carlo with him, on the 11th of July, 1315. And the Florentines, thus reinforced, lost no time in marching to meet the forces of the enemy.

They had strained every nerve to collect a powerful army. All the communities with which they were on friendly terms, had been asked to send their aid. There were in the Florentine army Bolognese, Siennese, men from Citta di Castello, from Gubbio, Perugia, Pistoia, Volterra, Prato, and other places of smaller mark, besides the mercenaries brought by Pietro, Count di Gravina, and the Prince of Taranto; in all a host of three thousand two hundred cavaliers, and a very large number of infantry. These forces left Florence on the 6th of August.

Uguccione had the veterans of the Emperor Henry's army, who had been hired by Pisa; and these, with his own band, which had accompanied him from Genoa, were the mainstay of his army. His force, however, was increased by the troops of Lucca, by those of his allies Maffeo Visconti, the Bishop of Arezzo, and the Count of Santaflora, and by all the Ghibelline exiles from Florence. But his entire army was considerably inferior to that of the Florentines, at all events in mounted troops, of which he had only two thousand five hundred.

He also had a "vast quantity" of foot soldiers; but, as usual, the number of these is not stated. They were esteemed of so little importance, that the historians rarely took the trouble to speak of them otherwise than as "an infinite quantity,"—"a vast crowd,"—"an uncountable number," or such-like phrases.

The two armies came in face of each other in the valley below Montecatini, having only the small streamlet

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of the Nievole between them. And in that position they remained several days watching each other, and engaging in a few isolated and unimportant skirmishes, neither party being anxious, as it would seem, to bring on a general engagement. Meantime all Italy, as we are assured by the contemporary historians, was awaiting in the utmost anxiety the result of the expected battle ; and it was universally felt that upon the issue of it depended the future fortunes of the two great parties, which divided between them, with a more or less sharply marked line of division, the whole peninsula.

At length, on the 28th of August, tidings reached Ugucione that the Guelphs of the country around Lucca, prompted and aided by emissaries from Florence, had succeeded in breaking up and barring the route by which provisions reached the army from Lucca. His position was thus rendered untenable. Burning therefore his camp defences in the course of that night, he was found by the Florentine army in the morning, with his entire force so arranged as to be ready for battle, if he should be attacked, or for moving off in the direction of Pisa, if the enemy should permit his doing so undisturbed.

The Florentine leaders, who had during all this time been over-weeningly confident in their superior numbers, while the Ghibelline general had been aware that nothing but extreme caution, vigilance, and prudence could make up for his inferiority in that respect, did not hesitate an instant about attacking him. As soon as ever the light of dawn showed that he was on the move, the news that the Ghibelline army was in flight ran through the Florentine camp ; and the French princes rushed to the attack with such haste, that considerable confusion prevailed in the ranks of their army, and many of the men-at-arms had not even time to put on their armour completely.

The first attack was made by the *feditori*\* of the Ghibelline army, on a corps of Siennese and men of Colle, who, being unable to withstand the onset, fell back on the body of Florentine cavalry under the Count of Gravina, followed up by the *feditori* as they retreated. The body of Florentine horsemen, however, stood firm, and not only so supported the Siennese as to enable them to reform themselves, but destroyed almost entirely the band of *feditori*. Among them fell Francesco della Fagiuola, the son of Ugucione, a young man of much promise, and Giovanni Malispini, a Florentine exile of note. Nevertheless the Florentine army, which, having begun the battle without having taken the necessary time to arrange itself in due order, had not recovered the confusion resulting thence, was not able to withstand the shock of the main body of the enemy. And when the death of his son was told to Ugucione on the field, as he was just about to charge at the head of the band of eight hundred German veterans, the tidings added such fury to his onslaught, that the wavering squadrons of the enemy gave way ; and though the Florentines and the Count of Gravina strove to stand firm, and did check the enemy for a short time, the rout soon became universal, and the greatest battle in which the Florentines had ever yet been engaged was lost irreparably.

The young Count of Gravina, and his nephew, the son of the Prince of Taranto, both fell ; and the body of the former was never found. Two thousand of the Florentine army were left slain on the field ; and one thousand five hundred were taken prisoners. The proportion of men of note and name among the killed was especially large. The Prince of Taranto and the remainder of the army fled in utter rout and confusion, some to Pistoia, and

\* It will be remembered that these "attackers" were a sort of forlorn hope, selected for this especial duty.



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some to Fucecchio. This terrible battle and complete defeat took place on the 29th of August, 1315, a day remembered with shame and sorrow for many years afterwards on the banks of the Arno.\*

The shock of this great disaster, however, did not suffice to prevent the Florentines from showing themselves immediately after it curiously unchangeable, both in their good and in their evil characteristics. They were not frightened into losing heart, or thinking for an instant of yielding, or modifying their political principles, or neglecting instant means for repairing their broken forces. Nor, on the other hand, were they frightened into concord among themselves. Other people have generally found, in foreign war at least, the advantage of a cessation from internal discord. But the fighting energy of these Florentines was such, that they would fight one day shoulder to shoulder against the foreign enemy, and the next, fly at each other's throats in the streets of their own city.

Deeply as the defeat of Montecatini was felt in Florence, the old historian boasts† that not for a day did the Florentine workmen cease from plying their various crafts; nor did the Signory lose a day in taking measures to repair the mischief, by raising money, making new levies, and hiring fresh troops. They sent off envoys instantly to the King of Naples, asking for a new general and more men. And King Robert, since one of his brothers had fallen, and another had disgraced himself in their service, sent them this time his brother-in-law, the Count Beltramo del Balzo, with two hundred horsemen.

He found, however, on arriving in Florence, that a very large portion of the citizens were unwilling to receive him, and were anxious to break off their connection with the

\* Villani, book ix. chaps. lxx., lxxi., lxxii.; Ammirato, book v.; Gonf. 136.

† Villani, book ix. chap. 74.

King. The new Signory, which came into office shortly after the application had been made to King Robert, were of this mind ; and they were supported by Messer Simone della Tosa, a man of great influence in the city, and by a great portion of the people. Disaster had produced its usual effect of disgusting the defeated with the government and the generals under whose guidance it had fallen upon them. But though the new Signory were backed by the larger part both of the great families and the people, it was impossible to find any means of breaking with the King before the ten years, during which the supreme authority had been entrusted to him, should be at an end.

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Under these circumstances, they determined at least to reduce the authority in the city of the new royal Vicar, Count del Balzo, to the smallest possible amount. With this view, they sent envoys first into France and then into Germany, for the purpose of engaging some leader of distinction, who, with his following of troops, might eclipse and make a nullity of King Robert's vicar. But neither of the negotiations was successful. Still, however, determined to find some means of attaining their object, they had recourse to an extraordinary step, the possibility of which proves fatally how little had been done in democratic Florence for the security of individual liberty, and how entirely all the efforts of the democracy in its repeated and successful attempts to liberate themselves from the authority of the nobles, had aimed in no degree at securing guarantees for good government and the personal freedom of the citizens, but wholly at obtaining the power of exercising themselves the irresponsible power of which they saw the evil in other hands.

When the two attempts to bring foreign aid from Germany or from France had both failed, the party opposed to the continuance of the authority of the Kings of Naples,

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consisting of the Signory in office, of Simone della Tosa and his adherents among the great families, and of a large—probably the larger—portion of the people, determined on creating a new and special office, for the purpose of placing in it a creature of their own, a man on whom they had cast their eyes, as thoroughly adapted to the carrying into execution of their designs. He was called the “Bargello”—a name which in after times became but too familiar a household word in Florence—and his duty was the execution of the orders of the Signory, without other form of law or warranty than the simple bidding of his masters. The man, who was brought into Florence for this purpose, was one Lando, of Gubbio, whose antecedent history had nothing in it to distinguish him from any other low-born ruffian, but whose short tenure of office in Florence has made his name a by-word of infamy and terror among the Florentines to this day. His qualifications for the position, and for the strange excess of power and authority confided to him, seem to have consisted solely of thoroughly unscrupulous ferocity, prompt and resolute determination, unflinching nerve, and bulldog-like fidelity to his employers. Five hundred foot soldiers and fifty horsemen were placed at his disposition ; and the tocsin bell was given into his keeping.

“The party in power created and made a *bargello*, one Lando d’Agobbio, a bloodthirsty and cruel man ; and on the 1st of May, 1316, they gave him the banner (*gonfalone*) and lordship ; and this man stood continually at the foot of the stair of the Palazzo de’ Priori with five valets armed with headsman’s axes.” This is the curt and crude statement of Villani ;\* and he goes on to relate how, under pretext of suspicion of Ghibellinism, this man proceeded to decimate the party opposed to the government.

\* Book ix. chap. lxxvi.



Without any warrant, save a secret hint from the Signory to their executioner, citizens were seized in the midst of their families, and, without even form of trial, led to immediate execution. In a word, a reign of terror was established in Florence; and the people seem to have been entirely, and one may say unaccountably, cowed and panic-stricken by it. It seems inconceivable that a population, which had again and again risen in arms, and made the city a battle-field on some party question as to the distribution of office and power—which had an organised machinery specially provided for the facilitation of such risings—should have remained passive under such a tyranny, and have offered their throats like sheep to the slaughterer without resistance. Yet such was unquestionably the case. The historians\* speak very shortly of this period, offering no word of comment or explanation of the extraordinary patience of the city under the infliction; apparently as if they were ashamed of dwelling on facts so humiliating. But the probability seems to be, that all the mechanism and habitudes of insurrection and resistance were adapted to the case of class rising against class. And the division of the city, which led to this hateful state of things, was not a class division. Had it continued, it would doubtless have soon become such. But while the terror lasted there were men of every class—nobles, great burghers, and populace—on either side.

This episode of a Florentine reign of terror affords a notable instance of the wide difference there may be between constitutional guarantees as to the persons to whom the power of governing shall be confided, and guarantees as to the mode in which that power shall be exercised. The Florentine democracy had been wholly intent on the former; and had entirely neglected the

\* Villani, *loc. cit.*; Ammirato, book v.; Gonf. 139; Coppo Stefani, book v.; Pubbr. 319.

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latter object. "By whom shall power be exercised?" and not "How shall it be exercised?" had ever been the question in Florence. The democracy of Florence was a better and more civilising government than the despotisms which were its contemporaries, because the objects at which the popular power aimed were better. But the modes in which it sought to achieve them were frequently as tyrannical in principle as the edicts of a despot could be.

The abominable presence of this Lando of Gubbio in the city did not last for much more than four months. But it was put an end to in an accidental manner, almost equally characteristic of another, though less serious, weakness of the Florentine character.

The Count Beltramo del Balzo, finding himself a mere cipher in the city, without any power, and in a false position, had easily yielded to the desires of those who wished to break with the King, and had quitted Florence. The party in opposition, however, who desired to continue the connection of the city with King Robert, sent messengers to him secretly, telling him the miserable state of things in Florence, and imploring him to send them another vicar. And this time Robert, who was by no means willing to break off an alliance which afforded him at need most valuable and available support in sundry ways, named Count Guido di Battifolle as his vicar. This nobleman belonged to a branch of the great Guidi family, which, separating itself from the rest of the race, had embraced Guelph principles at a very early date. The Guidi di Battifolle had for many generations been known as strong and staunch Guelphs. The new vicar was a man very highly respected personally, well known in Florence, where he had many friends, and exercising considerable influence in the country around. It was hoped that such a man might be able to win over the good

opinion of the city to the King; and, at all events, it would be impossible to accuse him of Ghibelline tendencies. A.D.  
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Count Guido came, and seems to have been unmolested, but was wholly without any power or influence in the city, and quite unable to put any check to the doings of the Bargello. Things went on thus till the autumn, when it so chanced that the daughter of Albert of Germany passed through Florence on her way to be married to the Duke of Calabria, son of the King of Naples. The King's brother, Gianni, the Archbishop of Capua, the Lord Treasurer, and Count Beltramo, the late vicar, together with a large company of great personages, came to meet the bride at Florence. Of course the citizens were as usual delighted at receiving so many great folks; and in their good humour suffered themselves to be persuaded so far to become reconciled with the faction that had always remained attached to the King, as to allow six priors of that party to be added at the next election to the seven of the other faction. And this measure of conciliation so far modified the tone of the government, that when King Robert, who had heard, on the arrival of his intended daughter-in-law and her escort, of the state of things in Florence, wrote to the government insisting that the Bargello should be dismissed, the Signory complied with the demand, and Florence was relieved of his presence in the course of the October of that year.

But while these events were taking place in Florence, after the great defeat of Montecatini, circumstances were occurring in Pisa and Lucca, in both of which cities Uguccone della Fagiuola was now exercising absolute power, that had a more important bearing on the future fortunes of all three communities.

Notwithstanding the success which had attended his arms, and the advantages Pisa had gained by the ability



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and valour of her general, there were discontents in the city, and a party of the citizens, which could ill tolerate the metamorphosis of their hired captain into their tyrant. They ought to have known that the change was but a development as normal as that of a chrysalis into a butterfly. But they either knew it not, or liked the result none the better for knowing it. The consequence was that Uguccone, the successful soldier of fortune, found it necessary to his safety to seize and behead Messer Banduccio Bonconti, one of the principal and most esteemed citizens of Pisa, and his son. The indignation of the city at this deed was deep and general. But the Pisans had chosen to set a successful soldier over them, and were obliged to take the natural consequences.

In Lucca, Uguccone had deputed his son, a brother of the youth who was killed under Montecatini, to rule as his deputy. And there also the citizens were beginning to chafe a little under the yoke, and with more of reason too than their neighbours of Pisa, for they had not placed it on their necks themselves. The blow, however, which avenged Lucca on her conqueror and oppressor was dealt by the last man among all the Lucchese from whom Uguccone might have expected it. The great Ghibelline family of the Interminelli were recalled from exile, as has been mentioned, as one of the consequences of the conquest of the city. And it had been by the assistance of this powerful clan that Della Fagiuola had been able to seize the supreme power in the state.

It was quite, however, according to the normal sequence of cause and effect in such cases, that jealousy should soon arise between the tyrant and those by whose influence he had risen to power. The Interminelli were too powerful to make safe subjects. There was one man among them, especially, whose character and qualities rendered him dangerous to the foreign tyrant. He was

not by birth a leading man among them, being a scion of a younger branch of the great clan. But he was one of those men who are destined to leave their mark in the world's history either as great criminals or great heroes, or both, according to the aspect of the times in which their lot shall have been cast. <sup>A.D. 1316.</sup> Castruccio Castracane degli Interminelli was fortunate in this respect. He was exactly fitted for his epoch. Resolute, prompt, and bold; excelling in all personal military exercises; unscrupulous, and full of resource; aspiring, but aspiring only to such things as were the recognised objects of ambition in the world around him; up to the highest mark of his time and his class, but not one jot in advance of it; with ability sufficient to play his part in the council-chamber as well as in the battle-field, and to comprehend political schemes larger than those confined within the limits of his little state,—he had the qualities needed for a popular hero in that age and clime. He had seen the world too; having, when left an orphan at twenty years of age, passed some time in England, where some of his family had large commercial interests, and afterwards travelled in France. He was born in 1280, and was therefore at the time in question thirty-six years old.

It was on the 10th of April, 1316, that young Della Fagiola, lieutenant in Lucca for his father, seized a pretext for throwing this dangerous man into prison. Of course the intention was to take his life. To have thus affronted and broken with him, and then to allow him to live, would have been madness indeed. Nevertheless the young lieutenant, when he had taken the first step, feared to take the second. He had meshed the quarry in his toils, but dared not strike the blow that was to despatch him.

In this difficulty he sent for his father from Pisa. On hearing the state of the case, Uguccione lost not a minute

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The tradition goes, that the first care of Ugucione, after his march from Pisa to Lucca, was to dine. He was a huge eater, we are told, and "liked to dine," equally disliking of course to be disturbed in his enjoyment. And unfortunately the news of what was taking place in Pisa, which had followed him to Lucca, reached him just as he was beginning his repast. It is said that had he instantly hurried back to Pisa he might, with the force at his command, have quelled the rebellion there at once. But Ugucione could not tear himself from a well-spread table. As soon as he had dined, he would give the Pisans a lesson, but not till then. But when that time came it was too late. The tidings of the insurrection of Pisa had then been spread through all Lucca, and now the well-dined usurper had two cities in revolt to deal with instead of one only.

Although he would not ride to Pisa while waiting for his dinner, Ugucione had found time before seating himself at table to order the execution of the prisoner, for the despatching of whom he had come thither. The block had already been prepared; the headsman was ready, and Castruccio had been brought out to undergo his fate, when the sudden rising of the city saved him. Somebody was needed on the spur of the moment to head the rebellion and accept the dangerous position of lord



of the city in opposition to the not yet defeated tyrant. The great name and recognised merits of Castruccio, as well as a sort of fitness arising from the narrow escape he had had from the tyrant's hand, pointed to him as the man for the place and the time. And he thus stepped from the scaffold to the sovereignty of his native city. A.D.  
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Overwhelmed by this second disaster, Ugucione seems to have lost his wonted energy and decision. He gave up all for lost, and getting as best he might out of the city with his son, he rode for Verona, then under the rule of his old ally, Cane della Scala.

So Castruccio Castracane became lord of Lucca, and Ugucione della Fagiuola,—as the Florentine tale of that terrible ogre ran for many a generation afterwards,—ate up two cities at one meal.



## BOOK III.

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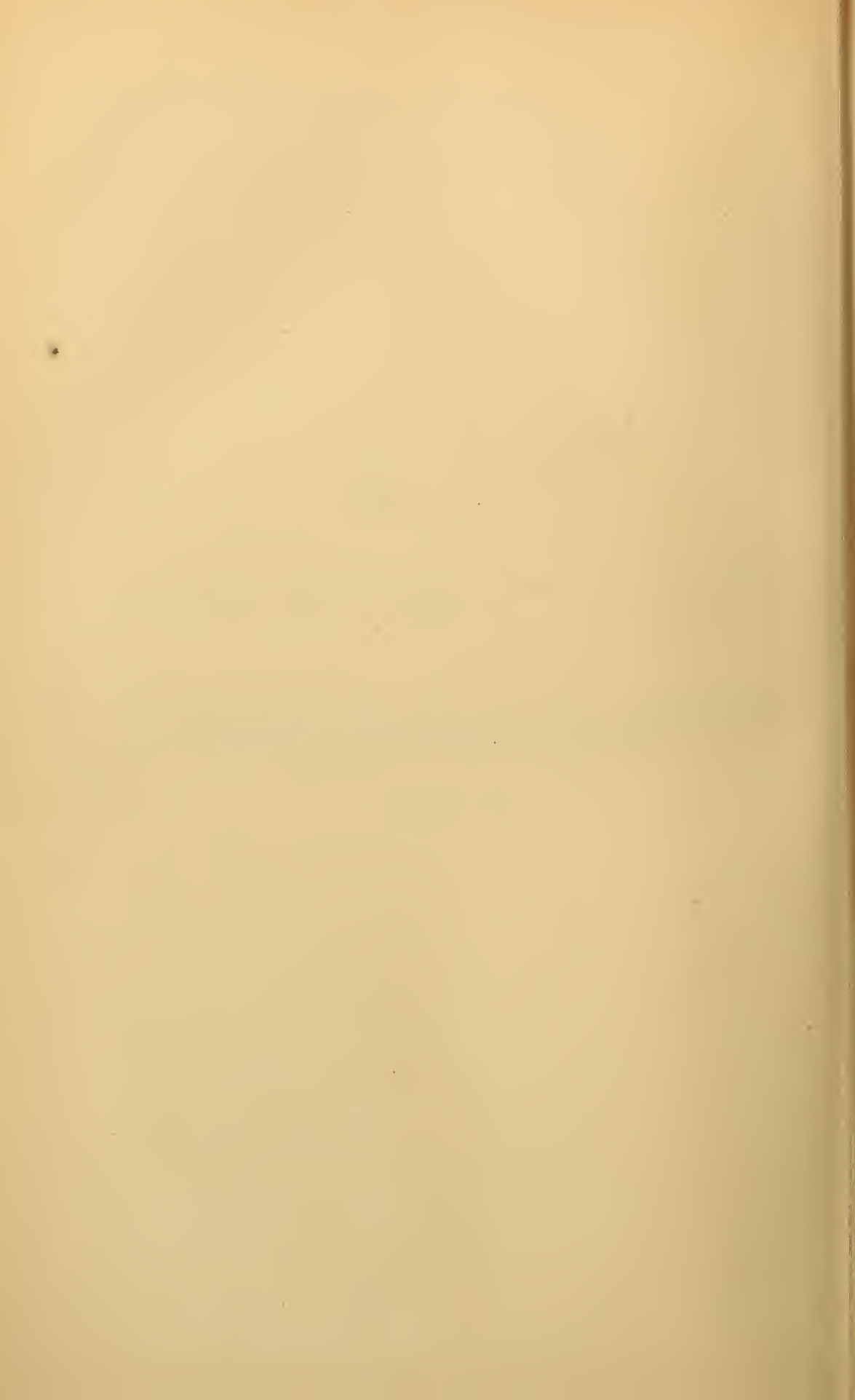
FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE WAR WITH CASTRUCCIO,  
A.D. 1320,

TO

THE CLOSE OF THE WAR WITH THE ROMAN COURT AT  
THE DEATH OF GREGORY XI., A.D. 1378.

58 YEARS.





## CHAPTER I.

Influence of Florence on the politics of Europe—Decrease of military and increase of commercial aptitudes—Banking business of Florence—Peace from 1315 to 1320—Italian Ghibellinism in the fourteenth century—Florentine constitutional failures—Political division of Italy—What the modern world owes to Florence—Influence of the “fuorusciti”—Castruccio Castracane—Machiavelli’s account of him—Motive that induced Florence to take part in the wars of Lombardy—Matteo Visconti—Incites Castruccio to make war on Florence—Castruccio commences the campaign—Tariff questions between Florence and Bologna—Philip of Valois in Italy—Death of Ugucione della Faggiuola—Florentine demonstration against Lucca—Florentines induce Spinetta Malispini to attack Castruccio—He meets the Florentine army at Montevettolino—The Florentine army falls back on Florence—Council of “popolani” created for the management of the war—Mercenary troops hired—Death of Dante—Notice of him by Villani—Florence in alliance with the Pope—Death of Matteo Visconti—The Pope coins counterfeit florins—Insurrection of Milan—Winter expedition of Castruccio in the Pistoia mountains—Count Beltramo del Balzo general of the Florentines—Valdarno ravaged by Castruccio—The people march out of Florence to defend Prato from Castruccio—Florentine forces pursue Castruccio into the Valdarno—Difference of opinion in the Florentine camp—Referred to the senate—Florentine boys force the decision of the senate—The nobles by treachery cause the return of the army to Florence—Armed bandit exiles threaten Florence—Treasons of the nobles—Failure of the means adopted to keep down the nobles—Intrigues of Castruccio—He obtains possession of Pistoia—Political feeling in Florence—Raimondo di Cardona arrives in Florence—His first exploits—Determination in Florence to fight a pitched battle with Castruccio—Formal declaration of war, 8th June, 1325—Florentine forces—Castruccio refuses battle before Pistoia—Dissensions in the Florentine camp—Azzo Visconti joins Castruccio—Battle of Altopascio—Great Florentine defeat.

For a long time after the first consciousness of independent existence began to stir the little community on the

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banks of the Arno within its narrow walls, material growth was the main law, and supplied the most observable phenomena of its existence. But for the last generation or so previous to the time at which we have now arrived, a vigorous enlargement of the political views and influence of the Commonwealth has been gradually becoming remarkable. And from the present time forward this will be yet more markedly and observably the case.

This merchant-ruled city, possessing a territory considerably less in extent than the county of York—a territory which, notwithstanding the teeming fertility of certain districts, was, on the whole, by no means a rich one, and was incapable of supplying a sufficiency of food for its inhabitants—had become already a power in Europe; and by no means one of the least influential. The founders of the Commonwealth started in social life, as the soldiers of Cromwell went forth to battle, with the sword in one hand and a book in the other. But the book, in which the Florentines put their trust, was not the Bible. The book in which Florence trusted, and on which she founded her political greatness, was *the ledger*. With the sword in her right hand and the ledger in her left, she went out to do her world-battle; and with both she did great things. But at the period of her history to which this chronicle has come, she began to shift the sword into the left hand, and take the ledger into the right. She began to do so; and as years grew on her, she did so more and more. A doctor of sociology, oracular with the experience and wisdom of another five hundred years of the world's history, would have shaken his head at the symptom. But the laws which regulate such matters, though sure enough, are slow in their operation, as measured by the ken of flying generations of span-long lived creatures. And for awhile a strong and living faith in the almighty golden florin did great things; and Florence, mounted on a pile of ledgers, stood



on a level with nations whose natural stature was very far greater than hers. A.D.  
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Indeed, the consideration of the standing which the Tuscan Commonwealth made for herself in the world of mediæval Europe, can hardly fail to lead the observer to remark many points of similarity between the position of modern England and mediæval Florence. The money-power of Florence as much exceeded that of any contemporary community, as that of England now exceeds that of all other countries. And the Florentine money-power was based on textile manufacture and banking. Nor will the mode in which she used this power fail to suggest to the reader's mind analogies with more than one period of our own national life and passage in our history. They also could subsidize nations bigger than themselves; could foment disaffection among the subjects of a tyrant, or supply a ruler with the means of subjugating his people, according as long-sighted views of the balance of political power, or of contingent commercial advantage, might dictate. They also could come forward as the patrons and protectors of princes in distress, and could influence the making of war or peace between powerful sovereigns by operating on the wires that opened or shut the sluices of financial supply. When Henry of Luxembourg was detained before Brescia by the obstinate valour of its inhabitants, it was Florence that had counselled the resistance, and backed her advice with offers of cash supply, which made it possible and effectual. It was Florentine intrigue that made Padua ungovernable in the hands of her Ghibelline lord, Cane della Scala. Among the troops which opposed Henry at Rome, there were regiments in the pay of Florence. Parma was induced to shut her gates against him by Florentine gold. The loans of the Florentine bankers, either in prospect or in "passivity," exercised very potent influence in the councils of Plantagenet and

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Valois monarchs. And more than one Pope found his most authentic inspiration in a Florentine bribe.

And in thus influencing Europe the ubiquitous banking transactions of the Florentines assisted them not only indirectly, by the creation of wealth, but directly, by providing them with agents, negotiators, and collectors of information on the spot, not only in every European capital city, but in every important centre of population. It is astonishing how large a portion of the negotiating business of Europe, not only on account of their own city, but of other powers, was carried on by Florentine merchants. The history of the twelve Florentine ambassadors, sent by twelve different potentates to Pope Boniface on occasion of the Jubilee in 1300, has been related; and it is but a special instance of what was more or less the case at every court in Europe. Those bankers and merchants who visited or resided in foreign cities for the needs of their trade, were statesmen and political personages at home; men accustomed to considerations of politics and the difficulties of governments; and assuredly inferior to none in that part of the diplomatist's duty, which is supposed to need rather the wisdom of the serpent than the simplicity of the dove.

The ruin of Uguccione della Faggiuola, which appeared to Florence—little guessing as yet that his fall had but made way for a far abler and more dangerous enemy to rise into power—one of those great and notable deliverances which the presumptuous arrogance of nations and of individuals leads them to term “providential,” as if every smallest event in their microcosms were not as much and as little so;—this deliverance from the victor of Montecatini gave rise to a period of unusual tranquillity in the city. And the prudent and well-intentioned government of the Count of Battifolle, who, from his intimate acquaintance with Florence, knew well how deeply rooted were many of the

causes of the ills from which she had been suffering in the family feuds of the leading citizens, and who strove with much success during the whole period of his vicariate to induce these hereditary enemies to become reconciled to each other, had contributed efficaciously to the same result. The other cities of Tuscany were also at peace ; so that the years between the great defeat at Montecatini, in 1315 and 1320, present a lull in the well-nigh perpetual storm of mediæval Italian history, which gave the city an opportunity of recruiting its financial resources, and preparing for fresh conflicts.

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For the condition and constitution of Italy rendered it quite impossible but that fresh conflicts should ere long arise. The recent presence of an Emperor in Italy had re-animated Ghibellinism throughout the peninsula. In Florence, although continued exile and the exasperating effects of a state of warfare had done much towards turning the expatriated Bianchi into Ghibellines, it may still be affirmed that Ghibellinism was, if not absolutely dead, powerless. Other quarrels and divisions of the city into parties on quite different questions and principles had contributed to this result. And the student of Florentine history must not allow himself to be deceived on this point by the occasional accusations of Ghibellinism, which he will find thrown at its opponents by some section of a party, which might with equal justice have been called Ghibelline itself. Such accusations were the mere froth and scum of party warfare. The victims of Bargello Lando during his short but disgraceful reign of terror were accused of Ghibellinism, much as in certain equally disgraceful periods of our own history men have been hunted down as "Papists." It had become little more than mere vulgar abuse and bad language to call a man a Ghibelline in Florence.

Beyond the walls of Florence, however, it was not the



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same thing. And although in no part of Italy did Ghibellinism mean exactly what it did in the days when a large part of the population, and almost all the privileged classes, recognized the Emperor as their actual and rightful sovereign, still it was the name by which a certain definite system of opinions, prejudices, and principles,—a certain platform, as it would be called in America,—was called and known. And the system of opinions and feelings faggoted up and labelled with that name may still be compendiously described, as it was described in a former chapter when the old Florentine Ghibellinism was in question, as *Toryism*. The communities in which Ghibellinism was in the ascendant were those in which the principle of authority was upheld and maintained against the rival principle of individual volition. The quarrel has not been quite fought out yet, although we have made our way to the discovery of something like the middle ground on which the two rival principles should meet and be reconciled. But no such reconciliation was dreamed of as possible, desirable, or conceivable in the fourteenth century, and the two systems had to fight to the death when they came into such close juxtaposition as they did in the microscopic states of mediæval Italy.

It will occur probably to the reader, when called on to regard Florence as the principal stronghold, supporter, and advocate of that principle of free will as opposed to authority, which came to be called Guelphism, that, commonwealth and democratic as she was, Florence had little claim to consider herself the champion of any such social system. And he will remember perhaps that he has been already called upon more than once in the course of this history to observe the almost total failure of her democratic institutions to secure to her people the advantages of individual liberty. But it must be borne in mind that

she was the first pioneer in a very difficult and intricate path. She was in the position of the first inventor of a watch, a steam-engine, or other complicated and wholly unprecedented piece of mechanism. Individual liberty, pure and simple, of course is simple savagery, and was not what was meant or wanted. How to secure the utmost amount of it compatible with the other correlative requirements of the case? Can it be deemed surprising, considering how far mankind has even yet got in finding an adequate and satisfactory solution to this problem, that the pioneers in the path of investigation and experiment should not only have failed to attain their object, but should have been but imperfectly conscious of it, and have never succeeded in even defining it clearly and intelligibly to their imaginations? Thus much they understood clearly and meant with their whole hearts; that they would not admit or tolerate the opposite principle, as it was understood, set forth and embodied in the world around them. They would not have the "*governo d' un solo.*" No despot! No lord and master, claiming to be such by right divine! No ruler of any sort, who rested his title to rule on any other basis than the consent and will of the people to be ruled! This was the first point that needed to be clearly established. And when we remember the principles and the practice and precedents of the world all around them, we must surely feel that the step so made was not a small one, nay, that it was the greatest and most difficult to make of all the path that has since been trodden in the same direction.

No government without the consent of the governed! Upon this point the Florentines were clear, and even fanatically earnest; so earnest, that the intensity of their allegiance to this fixed idea blinded them,—as the pursuit of fixed ideas will blind men,—to the evils of tyranny inflicted on them by means not incompatible with it.

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And this was the great principle of Guelphism which Florence had to uphold against the Ghibelline faith of nearly all the rest of the world.

One other remark has to be made respecting some of the allies of Florence in her Guelphism. It is a very obvious one, but may be just noted to avoid any misconception. When great principles are embodied in names, and when these names become party cries, by which a great variety not only of differently circumstanced individuals, but of differently circumstanced communities are divided, and under which they have to range themselves, it will occur that other considerations besides a real allegiance to the principle in question will decide the party connection of some among them. The sort of circumstances, which might easily cause some of the numerous states into which Italy was divided, to ally themselves with one party, when the nature of them would seem to assign their adherence to the other, are so obvious that it is needless to particularize them. It will be sufficient thus far to have reminded the reader, that he is not to look for pure Guelph principles in all the allies which rallied around Florence.

Having premised thus much, it may be well to state shortly the general division of Italy between the two contending parties and principles, that furnished the motive and gave its shape to the wars which are on the eve of beginning between Lucca, or rather between Castruccio Castracane degli Interminelli, who was the representative man of Ghibellinism in Italy at this period, and the Commonwealth of Florence.

Ghibellinism was nearly universal in the north of Italy, divided among a number of more or less well known great families, of whom the principal were the Visconti at Milan, and the Della Scala at Verona. Naples and the States of the Church were Guelph; the former, as need hardly be



suggested, from political circumstances, from opposition to the Empire, and from connection, rather than from principle. Tuscany and the whole of Central Italy were divided between the two, although the real strength and stronghold of genuine Guelphism was there. Without Florence, there would have been no Guelph party. Had those stout sandalled and leather-jerkined Florentine burghers of the thirteenth century not undertaken and persevered in that crusade against the feudal nobles and the Ghibelline principle, which, as has been seen, was the leading occupation and idea of the Commonwealth during all that century, Ghibellinism and Imperialism would have long since possessed and ruled Italy from the Alps to the toe of the boot;—with what ulterior consequences to Europe, who shall say? And consideration of this indubitable fact must lead to the admission that the stout, vigorous old Commune *did* accomplish a great work for which mankind still owes it a debt of gratitude,—did place itself with irremoveable energy and strength, like some huge boulder-stone in the course of a rushing water, and thus at a critical point turn the stream of human destinies into the course which has led onwards to a higher civilization. However much they may have failed,—those bold pioneers,—so to cut their new path through the jungle of social anarchy as to secure for themselves all the advantages of which they were in search, they did discover and keep alive in the world that one fundamental principle from which so much has followed and been evolved. No right-divine rulers! No government save by the consent of the governed! This was the underlying principle which, amid unruly passions of all sorts, cropped out in their manifold party wars, and for which they were now about to fight on a larger scale, and with a more clear and definite consciousness of the real object and motive of the strife.

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One other circumstance should be borne in mind, as it will contribute much towards a right understanding of the motives and forces that influenced the conduct of many of the parties in the struggles which commenced in Italy with 1320. Almost every city had its body of "*fuorusciti*;"—literally, "those who had gone out;"—proscrits and exiles, in fact, who represented the minorities, larger or smaller, as the case might be, in the different communities;—Ghibelline *fuorusciti* from Guelph cities, and Guelph *fuorusciti* from Ghibelline cities. The idea, that it was the natural and matter-of-course order of things for a political vanquished minority to be driven forth from the city, like drones from the hive, so deeply rooted in the Italian mind as to be producing a comparatively feeble after-crop of mischief even at the present day, probably arose from the violent incompatibility of the two principles, which found themselves face to face with each other within the narrow area of a small city's wall. The result was a disastrous one; and in the case of Florence very specially reads us a valuable lesson on the impolicy of political proscriptions. Political exile is a punishment for dissent from the majority, which not only fails to reform the culprit, and fit him to return, but never fails to be powerfully operative in the opposite sense. The strong Guelph constitution of Florence would have absorbed and assimilated any peccant humours of Ghibellinism; indeed had all but entirely done so; even as England absorbs and assimilates her Toryism. But Florence instead of allowing this healthy process to accomplish itself, kept up by her proscriptions an artificial preserve of Florentine Ghibellinism, which was always ready to unite itself with any enemy of the Commonwealth, not so much because of any community of political principle, as from a hope that the exiles might so attain their never-abandoned object of returning to their country. And so it was with all the

other cities to a yet greater degree, inasmuch as in many of them parties were more equally balanced than in Florence, and the exiled minority were not so hopeless a minority as were the Ghibellines in that city. Of course, the natural allies of all these bodies of proscripts were the neighbouring cities in which their principles were in the ascendant; and the assistance they were always imploring was very generally granted, from the consideration that the city against which it was asked, was at the same time affording an asylum and a rallying point to a body of “*fuorusciti*” from its own walls. A.D.  
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This was the position of Italy when Castruccio Castracane became Lord of Lucca, a city which though more equally divided than either Pisa, which was decidedly Ghibelline, or Florence, which was as decidedly Guelph, had been for the most part Guelph in its sympathies and alliances, until Uguccone della Faggiuola conquered it, and replaced its Ghibelline exiles, and first among them the Interminelli, by whose means he was himself, as we have seen, shortly supplanted. But it was not Lucca, but Castruccio, that was formidable to Florence. Not only as a soldier, but as a statesman, he was undoubtedly the foremost man in Italy of his time. And Machiavelli has recorded his opinion, that had he lived longer he would have subjugated all Italy; summing up his life of him by saying, that as while he lived he was inferior neither to Philip of Macedon, nor to Scipio of Rome, he would unquestionably have surpassed both of them, if he had had either Rome or Macedon, instead of Lucca, for a theatre of action.

But these are mere rhetorical flourishes; nor can it seriously be believed that Castruccio would ever have succeeded in so beating down the Florentine power as to have removed it out of the path of his ambition. Altogether this life of Castruccio, written by the celebrated Secretary some two hundred years after the death of his



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hero, is a strange and unsatisfactory production. Speaking of the rout of Montecatini, Machiavelli asserts that the Ghibelline army was led, not by Ugucione, but by Castruccio; that the loss of the Florentines amounted to the altogether incredible number of ten thousand, dead on the field; and that the Prince of Taranto was killed in the fight; together with other discrepancies from the usually received account; on which Ammirato observes,\* that some of these statements being unquestionably and notoriously false, it becomes probable that the rest may be so also. But there runs through this little work of Machiavelli a tone of sympathy with, and admiration for the despotic ruler, and a preference for his side as opposed to that of his own countrymen, fighting for the principle of free institutions, that does not give pleasant evidence to character on the much mooted question, what we are to think of the celebrated author of *Il Principe*. Several pages of his memoir are filled by the Secretary with a selection from the witticisms and sharp sayings of his hero, which are really so pointless, as to suggest either a low estimate, not so much of the great captain, from whose idle words these gleanings have been raked up, as of the professed wit and man of letters who has recorded them; or a high estimate of the progress of general taste and intelligence during the past five hundred years.

It may, however, be worth while to give the description which Machiavelli has left us of the appearance of this remarkable man. "In person," he says, "he was of more than ordinary stature; and every portion of his body was well proportioned to his great height. He was so pleasing in appearance, and he received all persons with so much affability, that no one ever left him discontented with him. His hair was of a reddish shade, and he wore it cut short

\* Book v. Conf. 137.

over his ears. And he always, whatever weather it might be, even if it rained or snowed, went about with his head uncovered."\* Such was the bodily presentment of the man, who did more for the Ghibelline cause, than any Emperor had ever been able to accomplish; and who,—though the exaggeration of Machiavelli's estimate of the possibilities before him may be rejected,—would, it may well be believed, have made a yet deeper mark in the history of his time, had his life not been brought to a close prematurely.

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The Florentines were the first to break the peace, at least as far as Tuscany was concerned. War was going on during all these years, (1315-1320,) in Lombardy, and both King Robert and the Signory of Florence deemed it prudent to give such support to what little Guelph power existed in the north of Italy, as should prevent Ghibellinism from mastering the whole country. This was deemed an important point, because any Emperor marching into Italy must needs pass through Lombardy. If but one or two cities there could be kept in the Guelph interest, the invader would find it necessary to take them before continuing his march southwards; a siege would be requisite; time would be lost by him, and gained by Florence and the Tuscan cities;—a short space of warning which might be invaluable to them. Such interference was the more necessary just then, in that Matteo Visconti, an active and able captain, and the chief and main support of Ghibellinism in the north of Italy, was gradually making himself and his Ghibelline allies masters of the whole district. One of the chief of these, Cane della Scala, of Verona, had recently made himself master of Cremona, one of the few important Guelph cities in Lombardy. And although Florence had no interest or

\* Machiavelli, *Vita di Castruccio Castracane*. Opere, ediz. italia. 1813, vol. ii. p. 127.

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concern in the matter beyond the political expediency of not permitting Guelphism to be extinguished in the north of Italy, that motive was deemed sufficient to induce her to send three hundred horse of her own, increased to a thousand by the contributions of the other Tuscan Guelph cities, to assist the exiles who had been ousted from Cremona by Cane della Scala at the last revolution, in recovering their position. This was successfully done; and Cremona was, on the 10th of October, 1319, restored to the Guelph interest. But this interference of the Tuscan city in the affairs of Lombardy, followed as it shortly was by information, which reached the ears of Matteo Visconti, that a scheme had been arranged between Florence, the new Pope John the XXII., and Robert of Naples, for inviting Philip of Valois, the brother of the king of France, to come into Italy in the character of Vicar of the Church for the abatement of the Ghibelline power, and specially as an enemy to the House of Visconti, Lords of Milan, made it appear urgent, to find some means of repressing the Guelph party generally, and humbling Florence in particular.

The object in view was, as Ammirato says,\* “to raise such a flame in Florence itself as to give the citizens enough to do in attending to their own affairs.” And it seemed to Visconti, as he cast about for the means of effecting this, that Castruccio was the very man for the purpose. During the four years of peace since he had become Lord of Lucca he had been busily employed in gathering resources both of men and money. He had succeeded in getting together a considerable force of old well-trained soldiers; he was in strict alliance with the neighbouring powerful Ghibelline community of Pisa, and was altogether in a position to be a very formidable

\* Book v. Gonf. 161.



enemy. To Castracane, therefore, Visconti addressed himself; laid before him the secret plan for bringing the French prince into Italy as a preparative for a general attack upon the Ghibelline party, and pointed out to him how certainly a league, which considered itself strong enough to attack so powerful a prince as the Lord of Milan, of Pavia, Piacenza, Lodi, Como, Bergamo, Novara, Vercelli, Tortona, and Alexandria, would overwhelm him, the master only of Lucca, if they were successful in the first enterprise. He urged on him, therefore, the prudence of attacking Florence at once, and endeavouring to cripple her effectually before the combinations she was meditating could be completed. He further enlarged on the advantages Castruccio might find in a close alliance with the house of Visconti, and hinted that it might be available not only for the preservation of what he at present possessed, but for the acquisition of much greater matters.

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Castruccio, though perfectly well aware that the object of Visconti was to make use of him as a means of diverting a powerful enemy from his own frontiers, yet thought that the arguments adduced were true ones, and that the policy recommended to him was sound. And having made up his mind to act on it, he did so with the suddenness of a thunder-clap. Regardless of the oath, taken by him when peace had been made, which bound him not to break it without due notice and formal declaration of war, he suddenly marched into the lower Valdarno in the April of 1320, and had taken some half score of towns and castles, almost before it was known at Florence that war had begun.

Florence was startled by the news as she was busy in the peaceful work of adjusting tariff questions with her neighbour Bologna across the Apennines. And though she had to turn with hot haste to more exciting cares, and events are pressing on, it is worth our while to stop a

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moment to notice that little trading question. For those traders had just made a discovery, which would have saved the world no small amount of care and cash, if it would only have condescended to learn from them. Bologna having much need of money to defend herself from the Ghibellines of Lombardy, very simply and naturally doubled the duty on merchandise entering her gates. But having to her infinite astonishment discovered, when she came to count the proceeds in her treasury, that she had gotten not twice as much, but half as much as before; and having at once set to work to investigate the causes of this surprising phenomenon, it was found that "the Florentines had deserted the road of Bologna," and carried their goods another way. So the Bolognese being mere traders and not statesmen, instantly sent envoys across the Apennines to tell their neighbours that the duties were put back again to their old figure.

The news of Castruccio's inroad suddenly recalled all the thoughts and cares of the Commonwealth to more urgent and less profitable considerations. And the Signory seem to have been well aware from the first that they had no ordinary enemy to deal with in the new Lord of Lucca, and that the present disasters were but the first drops that heralded a storm, which it would need all the strength and energy of the Commonwealth to resist. And indeed the heavy storm-drops soon began to fall more and more thickly. Before any measures could be taken for the repair of the mischief in the Valdarno, the citizens heard of their seemingly ubiquitous enemy in the Lunigiana and Garfagnana, districts of the Florentine territory to the north of Lucca. The city appears to have been panic-stricken, and was only partially relieved by hearing that Philip of Valois had arrived in Italy, and was in presence of the Visconti forces between Vercelli and Novara. There was gladness also in the city at the

news of the death of an enemy who had always been a special bugbear to the popular imagination of the Florentines,—the gigantic Ugucione, who ate up two cities for supper. The old warrior, who, since the day of his expulsion from Lucca, had been continually fighting in the service of Cane della Scala, died at Verona in the autumn of 1320, at a considerable age, but worn out rather by a life of perpetual warfare than by years.

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It very soon appeared, however, that little was to be hoped from the assistance of the French prince, whose march into Italy had been the object of so much negotiation and intrigue. For some unexplained reason, at the moment when the Guelph hopes were the highest, he suddenly made peace with Visconti at Mortara,—a little town not very far distant from Villafranca,—and marched back into France.

The Florentine territory was nevertheless liberated for the moment from the wasting inroads of Castruccio, by his departure northwards to assist the Ghibelline exiles from Genoa in besieging that city. And Florence recovered her equanimity and her resolution sufficiently to act with a patriotism, as regarded the general welfare of Italy, which was not often manifested in those ages. For feeling deeply the importance to the Guelph cause of Genoa, which was in a great measure the key of Italy, and convinced that the presence of Castruccio and his veteran troops would turn the scale against the defenders of the city in that obstinately contested siege, they determined, at the risk, or rather at the certainty of loss and suffering to themselves and their own territory, to make such a demonstration against Lucca as should compel his return to defend his own capital. The measure was entirely successful. Castruccio hurried back from before the walls of Genoa, and that city was saved. Nor did Florence suffer for her devotion to the general Guelph



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But each party perfectly well knew that its adversary was planning new modes of attack. And the Florentines, thinking that they had found a means of placing Castruccio between two fires, were the first to recommence hostilities. There was in the mountains of the Lunigiana a territorial magnate, the Marchese Spinetta Malispina, who, although a Ghibelline, had been despoiled of well-nigh all his castles and estates by Castruccio. He was of course ready for any desperate attempt against his oppressor; and the Florentines, cautiously taking hostages from him to secure his good faith, sent him a force of three hundred cavaliers and five hundred infantry, with which, together with such as were faithful to him of his own retainers, he attacked and regained some of the places he had lost. The Florentines meanwhile, imagining that Castruccio would immediately rush to punish this audacious attack made upon him by a poor ruined country noble, had prepared the main strength of their forces to attack Lucca itself directly he should have left the city. But Castruccio was far too wide awake to be made the dupe of any such trick. He rightly guessed that the Marchese would never have dreamed of attacking him, if not acting at the instigation and with the support of Florence. And perceiving at once the entire plan, he became aware that it behoved him to prepare himself for a

\* Ammirato, book v. Gonf. 165, 166, 167, 168; Villani, book ix. chaps. cvi. cix. cx. cxi. cxv.

serious attack on his head-quarters. He sent, therefore, in all haste to his Ghibelline friends in Lombardy, to Matteo Visconti especially, for succour, and obtained it with such promptitude and secrecy, that the Florentines were utterly astonished and taken aback when Castruccio, entirely neglecting the attack in the Lunigiana, and leaving the Marchese Malispina to enjoy a brief period of triumph as he pleased, marched out of Lucca against them with a well-appointed army of sixteen hundred cavaliers, and "common soldiers without number." On the 7th of June, 1321, the two armies came into presence in the neighbourhood of Montevettolino, a small fortified village on the southern slope of the spur of hills which divides the valley of the Ombrone from that of the Arno. The Florentine general, Guido della Petrella, at once recognized the inability of his army to cope with that of Castruccio with any hope of success; and withdrew to a spot called the Belvedere, a culminating point of the range of hills, so called from commanding a view over either valley. The army of Castruccio followed him up the steep hill, and at nightfall took up a position in the immediate neighbourhood of that occupied by the Florentines. Had the Lucchese attacked that night, the Florentines, as they themselves admit, must have been utterly routed. Fortunately the night turned out a dark and stormy one, and the rain fell in torrents; so that, near as the two camps were, there was no possibility of either party seeing what was going on among their neighbours. Taking advantage of this, Petrella lighted a number of torches and faggots, and leaving them burning, so as to lead the enemy to think that the camp was on the alert, quietly withdrew down the hill side under cover of the storm, and got his army safe off to Florence. But he thus left the unhappy country to the mercy of the enemy; who, finding in the morning that he had been tricked, and that the prey of which he had made sure had escaped him, em-

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1321. ployed himself unchecked in ravaging the whole of the lower Valdarno.\*

There was great discontent and a strong outcry against the Signory in Florence on account of these disasters ; which was appeased by the creation of a special council of twelve "*popolani*," two for each ward of the city, without the advice of whom the Signory was to take no step respecting the conduct of the war.†

Later in the year, in August, the Signory succeeded in hiring a force of an hundred and sixty cavaliers in Friuli, under Jacopo di Fontanabuona, a landed noble and captain of free lances of that country ; who, after his arrival in Florence, was of much use in checking the incursions of Castruccio. But no further action of importance took place that year ; and the city was much engaged by the new arrangements made necessary by the termination of the eight years, during which the supreme Protectorship of the city had been given to King Robert of Naples. That connection now came to an end ; though the parties to it remained still close allies and friends.

The year 1321 was, however, marked by one event of a higher interest for all future generations than any of these wars and warriors which occupied so much larger a space in the thoughts of their contemporaries. It was the year of Dante's death ; and the fact is recorded in the chronicle of his fellow-citizen Villani, in a chapter headed "Who the poet Dante Alighieri of Florence was ;" some passages of which mark so curiously the sort of estimation in which the poet was held by his contemporaries, that it is worth while to quote them.

"In the said year, 1321," writes the chronicler,‡ "in the month of July, died in the city of Ravenna, Dante

\* Villani, book ix. chap. cxxvii. ; Ammirato, book v. Gonf. 171.

† Villani, book ix. chap. cxxviii. ; Ammirato, book v. Gonf. 172.

‡ Villani, book ix. chap. cxxxvi.



Alighieri, of Florence, having recently returned from an embassy to Venice, in the service of the Signori da Polenta, with whom he was living. And in Ravenna, in front of the door of the principal church, he was buried with much honour, in the dress of a poet and a great philosopher. He died an exile from the Commonwealth of Florence, in about the 56th year of his age. This Dante was an honourable citizen of Florence, of old family, of the ward of St. Peter, and a neighbour of my family. And the cause of his exile from Florence was, that when Messer Carlo di Valois, of the royal house of France, came to Florence in the year 1301, and drove into exile the Bianchi, as has been hereinbefore related, the said Dante was one of the principal governors of the city, and a member of that party, although he was a Guelph. Wherefore, without other fault of his, he was driven out and banished from Florence, together with that party; and went to the university of Bologna, and thence to Paris, and to many other parts of the world. He was a very learned man in nearly every branch of knowledge, and a consummate rhetorician, both in prose and verse, as well as a most eloquent public speaker. In verse he was supreme, writing with the most polished and elegant style that our tongue had ever been found capable of up to his time, and, indeed, much later. He wrote in his youth a book on the 'New Life of Love.' And afterwards, when in exile, he composed twenty most admirable lyrics on love and moral subjects; and, among other things, three very noble letters:—one to the Signory of Florence, complaining of his exile for no fault;—another to the Emperor Henry when he was at the siege of Brescia, blaming him as it were with prophetic knowledge for his delay there;—and a third to the Italian Cardinals during the vacancy of the See after the death of Pope Clement, urging them to agree in the election of an Italian Pope. These are all written in Latin, in a lofty

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style, full of excellent sentiments and authorities, and were much admired by competent judges. He wrote, also, the *Commedia*, in which he treated, in an hundred chapters or cantos, of hell, and purgatory, and paradise, in exquisite verse, and adorned with many great and profound questions of morals, natural science, astrology, philosophy, and theology, and set forth, with new and beautiful images, comparisons, and poesies, in a manner more lofty than can be expressed, as whosoever hath a subtle wit may gather for himself from the work. It is true that in that *Commedia* he indulged in declamation and railing, as poets will, more, perhaps, in some parts than he ought to have done. But perhaps his exile drove him to do this. He wrote, also, a treatise on Monarchy, in which he treated of the functions of the Pope and the Emperor. This Dante was, by reason of his learning, somewhat presumptuous, and disdainful and arrogant; and, after the fashion of a philosopher of inelegant manners, was no good hand at conversing with the unlearned. But for his other excellencies, for his science, and for the renown's sake of so distinguished a citizen, it seems proper to award him an undying remembrance in this our chronicle; although the noble works which he has left us in writing bear truthful and honourable testimony to his worth."

So honest Villani, having conferred immortality on Dante thus magisterially, goes on his way, returning to more important matters, as "How the sun was darkened when the King of France died."

For a few months after the cessation of the protectorate of the King of Naples in Florence, nothing of much importance was done towards bringing to a decision the antagonism between the Commonwealth and its great enemy Castruccio. Both parties contented themselves with indirect endeavours to advance their several objects;—the Florentines by assisting the Guelph party wherever

it needed assistance, in Lombardy chiefly, either in attacking the adverse party, or in defending itself when attacked ; —and Castruccio mainly in forming treasonable understandings with traitorous citizens in various cities of Tuscany, destined to be the means, when a favourable opportunity should arrive, of making himself master of them, as he had become master of Lucca, by one of those sudden revolutionary movements which were so often successful in the Italian cities.

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Florence throughout this period was in close alliance with the Pontiff, who was at war with her enemy Matteo Visconti, in Lombardy. The spiritual arms of the Church, which had so often been used against her were now as freely used against her foes ; and she had the satisfaction of knowing that when, in 1322, Matteo Visconti died in his 90th year,\* he died under the ban of the Church, and was denied Christian burial. With such a pope it was impossible for Florence to be very angry, although he did issue a false coinage with the name and in the likeness of their golden Florin ; † especially when he put forth a bull, threatening with excommunication anybody else who should do the like.

The death of old Matteo Visconti, nonagenarian as he was, was felt to be a blow to the Ghibelline interests ; for though he left sons, in the prime of their age, especially Galeazzo, to succeed him, it was thought that the young man would not hold his own dominions as firmly, nor give such support to the Ghibelline cause as his father had done. And these suspicions were very soon justified by the insurrection, first of Piacenza, and then of Milan itself against him. This last news threw Florence into a paroxysm of delight ; and public rejoicings were decreed, and festivals of all sorts celebrated on occasion of it.‡

\* Ammirato, book vi. Gonf. 178 ; Villani, book ix. chap. clvi.

† Villani, book ix. chap. clxxi. ‡ Ammirato, book vi. Gonf. 180.



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But the triumph of Florence on this score was very short-lived; for within two months the popular mind in Milan had veered; and Galeazzo was proclaimed Lord of that city, amid the shouts of his subjects.

The year 1323 began with an attack by Castruccio on the fortresses in the hill country, between Lucca and Pistoia; specially on Lucchio, a village and castle (of which the ruins may yet be seen) situated in a wonderfully picturesque and inaccessible position, among jagged peaks and chestnut forests, about half way between the now well-known baths of Lucca, and the town of San Marcello in the Apennines, behind Pistoia. It was for the second time an exceptionally severe winter; and the Florentines had deemed it quite impossible for an armed force to penetrate the snows and torrent barriers of those rugged and roadless mountain valleys. But Castruccio Castracane's enterprize and activity falsified their calculations. Dismounting his men-at-arms, he led them on foot over a country, that to most captains would have appeared impracticable in the height of summer; and took Lucchio, and various other strongholds in that and the adjoining districts.\*

The Florentines, in their distress and eagerness to find some means of enabling themselves to contend on equal terms with their indefatigable and ever-alert foe, sent proposals to that Count Beltramo del Balzo, King Robert's brother-in-law, whom they had but a few months before refused and driven from their city, to come and assume the command in chief of their armies. He assented; and arrived in Florence with two hundred cavaliers on the 17th of May, 1323. But the first result of his arrival was a disastrous one. Messer Jacopo Fontanabuona, who has been mentioned as the leader of the body of troops engaged

\* Ammirato, book vi. Gonf. 137.

by the Commonwealth in Friuli, and who had done good service, and shown himself faithful to his hirers, took offence at having a new comer placed over him in command, and went over with his soldiers, to Castruccio. This was a heavy blow, telling doubly as it did; for those hardy mountaineers were good soldiers; the best perhaps then in the service of the Commonwealth.\*

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The result of this unexpected piece of good fortune to Castruccio, was immediately seen in a renewal of incursions, and ravages of the Florentine territory. The unhappy inhabitants of the lower Valdarno, again saw their fields overrun, their growing crops destroyed, their farms harried, their houses burned. And the Florentines being unprepared for resistance to such forces as Castruccio commanded, kept close within their walls, and made no attempt to protect their unfortunate subjects; till emboldened by success, and by the apparent lethargy of the enemy, he advanced into the heart of the Florentine territory, as far as Prato, a flourishing city between Florence and Pistoia, only twelve miles from the former, and attempted to seize the town.†

But this was more than the popular mind of Florence could tolerate; and the attempt led to a series of circumstances and scenes so singularly characteristic and illustrative of the life in the mediæval Italian cities, and specially of the temper and humours of the Florentines, that, though the story is but an isolated episode, which exercised no appreciable influence on the ulterior fortunes of the war, it must not be omitted.

No sooner was the news of Castruccio's appearance in the immediate neighbourhood of Prato known in Florence, than the whole city was in commotion. It was no longer a question of sending troops and arraying armies. Every

\* Villani, book ix. chap. ccviii.

† *Ibid.*, chap. ccxiv.

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man shut his shop, seized his arms, and prepared instantly to set out for Prato, and help in driving back the audacious leader, who had come to beard Florence within twelve miles of her own walls. For once, all classes and all parties were united. Nobles, burghers, and populace all rushed to the Prato gate. The Signory hurriedly passed a law, that any bandit or exile from the city, not Ghibelline, who should present himself before Prato, and join the expedition, was *ipso facto* relieved from all past condemnations, and all pains and penalties whatever. This invitation was addressed rather to those, who had been banished or who had fled from the city, on account of ordinary crimes and violences, than to political exiles. And the result of it was an addition to the tumultuously assembled Florentine host of four thousand bandits,—“ferocious fellows fit to be employed in any desperate enterprize;” \*—and the entire force that was gathered together before Prato was 1500 horsemen, and 20,000 foot.

Castruccio, great captain as he was, knew that he had no force to oppose to such a force as that; and he therefore in the night, which elapsed between the arrival of these masses of men at Prato, and the battle which they proposed fighting the next day, played them the same trick which the Florentines had played him at Belvedere, and retreated with all his force, under cover of the night, towards the Valdarno and Lucca. Then in the morning arose a great difference of opinion, and violent dispute among the Florentine host, on the question whether they should content themselves with having saved Prato, which was what they came out to do, or should follow Castruccio in his retreat, and force him to a battle. The nobles in the army were all of the former opinion, the populace of

\* Ammirato, book vi. Gonf. 184.



the latter. The nobles reminded the people of the battle of Montecatini, and of what had resulted from acting precisely as they now wished to do toward Ugucione della Fagiola; spoke of the wisdom of making golden bridges for retreating enemies; and referred to the misfortune of Montaperti, occasioned by the determination of the people to fight, in opposition to the advice of the nobles. The populace accused the nobles of cowardice, and of secret sympathy for Castruccio and the Ghibelline cause.

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As the dispute only became more violent the longer it lasted, and the captains of the army were powerless to decide the question in either sense, it was determined to send messengers in all haste to the Senate, demanding their decision on the point. The Senate met in all haste; but it soon appeared that it was as divided in opinion on the matter in question as the army; and the division was in the same sense; the burghers, supported by all the out-of-doors populace, were in favour of pursuing the enemy, and attacking him, even were it within the walls of his capital, and the nobles were for letting well alone, and contenting themselves with what had already been accomplished. It became necessary for the Signory, therefore, to decide the matter; and that body (consisting, as the reader will remember, of the Gonfaloniere and the *Priori*, or wardens of the guilds), though wholly plebeian in its constitution, yet feeling deeply the weight of the responsibility, and having before their eyes the two great disasters of Montaperti and Montecatini, was slow to come to a final determination.

Meanwhile the city was waiting impatiently for the decision. The greater part of the able-bodied men had gone out with the host to Prato. But the boys were in the city; and the Florentine boys were, like the London 'prentice boys of old, a power in Florence after a sort. And suddenly the Piazza below the windows of the *Palazzo Pubblico*, within which the puzzled Signory were

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coming to no decision, was filled with a crowd of boys,—boys only, with no man among them,—each one with his apron full of stones. A cry was raised for an immediate order to the army to march against the enemies of Florence. And when, after a minute's pause, no answer was forthcoming, a sudden storm of stones smashed every window in the palace. And, “as though it were fated that every class and condition of the people might have it to say that they had at some period or other borne rule in Florence,”\* the boys decided the question. “Monstrous as it is to relate, the majesty of the Gonfaloniere, the Priori, the Council of Twelve, and all the Senate together, had to bend themselves to their will; and so decreed that the army should, without further question, pursue the enemy into the territory of Lucca.”\*

So the army commenced its march from Prato. But when it had reached the Florentine frontier, the nobles, still determined at any cost to have their own way, succeeded in arresting all further progress by raising a report among the bandits,—those 4000 ferocious fellows ready for anything,—that the Signory had no intention of keeping its promise to them, of pardoning their past misdeeds. The result of this treacherous whisper was, that all these desperate men, separating themselves in a body from the rest of the army, marched directly upon Florence, with the purpose of compelling the government by force to keep faith with them. Very great alarm was felt in the city when they appeared unexpectedly before the walls. But with the earliest dawn of the following day a messenger arrived from the army, with tidings that it was in full march, and not far from the city. Florence was thus saved from being hostilely entered by its own outlaws. But the city remained deeply mortified and humiliated, as

\* Ammirato, book vi Gonf. 184.

it might well be, at the upshot of its great march with ban and arrière ban to Prato.

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The nobles pressed hard that the pardon which had been offered to the outlaws should be maintained, urging not only the justice of the case, but the expediency in the present circumstances of the city, of retaining the arms of so many brave and fighting men. But this the Signory absolutely and steadily refused, alleging that these men had irretrievably forfeited all title to consideration of any kind, by appearing with arms in their hands in hostile guise before the city. They had, at all events, inflicted some hours of mortal fear on the "*popolani grassi*" of the Signory; and that is an offence men do not easily forgive.

On the other hand, there was very good reason to believe that the motives of the nobles, or at least of many among them, for wishing to have these reckless and dangerous men in the city were by no means those which they put forward. A conspiracy was shortly afterwards discovered on the very eve of its execution, got up between a party among the nobles and the outlaws; the object of which was to admit the entire body of them into the city by night, to set fire to the town in various places, and in the confusion to bring about an entire revolution in the government, deposing the Gonfaloniere and the entire Signory, burning all the archives in which the records of laws passed against the nobles were preserved, and establishing a strictly oligarchic form of government. The plot was discovered just in time to defeat it; and it became pretty well known in the city that the chief conspirators were Amerigo Donati, the son of Corso, Teghia Frescobaldi, and Lotaringo Gherardini. But "no one of the people dared to accuse any of them by name in the council, fearing to be assassinated as they returned home in the evening; since the taking away of all power from the nobles in public affairs did not deprive them of their



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private power, and the plebeians were not defended by respect for the Signory in the darkness of night.”\*

It is a very remarkable fact, that after all that had been done in Florence to depress the nobles, even tyrannically, and to subject them, as if they were an inferior caste, to the authority of the people, we should still find them thus dangerous and thus formidable to their fellow-citizens. Strange that the terror of their lawless violence should so paralyze every part of a government which had the whole political and executive power in its hands! And it might be felt that such a condition of things might justify the extraordinary and anti-social means taken by the Commonwealth for the abatement of such an evil, were it not that every such measure was in reality calculated to preserve and perpetuate the mischiefs it was intended to eradicate. Laws against nobles were not only a legal recognition of the difference between them and other men, but an indication, and, at the same time, a nourishment of the belief in the popular heart that there really did exist such difference. Had the exactly contrary course been taken,—had the government refused to see or know any difference whatever between a plebeian and a patrician,—the dangerous enmities between the two classes would have shortly disappeared, together with the destruction of the boundary line that separated them.

But the government sought to relieve the city, which had been much agitated at the discovery of the conspiracy, by the same old plan which had proved so inadequate on former occasions;—the devising and adding to the constitution of new popular magistracies, without the least reason for believing that they would be more efficacious towards the end in view than the former arrangements. Fifty-six “*Pennonieri*”—flagbearers—were appointed, so many to

\* Ammirato, book vi. Gonf. 184.

each ward, whose duty it was to put themselves at the head of the populace in arms whenever there should be any need of defending the popular form of government.

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Castruccio, indefatigable as ever, did not cease during the following year, 1324, to endeavour both by fair means and foul to increase his own power and diminish that of his enemy. He harassed the Florentine territory by continued raids, and he plotted treason within the walls of Florence, Pisa, and Pistoia. His accomplice in Florence was Tommaso Frescobaldi, who had undertaken to corrupt the foreign soldiers and give up the city to Castruccio. But the Signory discovered the treason, and the noble traitor, leaving one of his agents to pay for his crime with his head, escaped out of the city, and was sentenced to perpetual infamy and the confiscation of all his property. In Pisa Castruccio was equally unsuccessful. In that Ghibelline city his unscrupulous treachery had not even the excuse of being exerted for the advancement of the great Ghibelline cause, but was palpably a mere attempt to increase his own power and dominion. Among his *virtues*, it was reckoned by his contemporaries that he was "faithless towards those who were faithless to him." And the latter category must, it is to be presumed, be taken to include all those who were not bound to any fidelity towards him. For we do not find that the Count Thieri della Gherardesca, the ruler of Pisa, had been guilty of any treachery towards him. Yet Castruccio suborned assassins in Pisa to murder him, with his son, and others of the leading citizens. But in Pisa also the plot was discovered, and the instruments of the great man suffered alone the penalty due to him and themselves. In Pistoia he was more fortunate. There his intrigues took the form of buying the most powerful man in the city, Filippo Tedici. Ten thousand golden florins and the hand of Castruccio's daughter were the price for which this man

A.D. 1325. agreed to sell his country to the Ghibelline tyrant. The bargain was duly executed, and Castruccio took possession of Pistoia,\* on the 5th May, 1325.

The Florentines, when they saw that city lost to them, “cursed again and again the avarice of the evil ministers who for their own ends had delayed the purchase of Pistoia, till Filippo Tedici was obliged in despair to throw himself into the arms of Castruccio.”†

This last misfortune was but one in a long series of mishaps, which had caused great grief and discouragement to the Florentines, and had thrown a gloom over the city. The continual inroads on the territory of that terrible Castruccio, by far the most formidable enemy that the Commonwealth had ever known;—the never-ending still beginning activity with which he was ever scheming new attacks by open force or stealthy treachery against the city;—the consciousness that disaffection and treason lurked within their own walls, as had been but too largely proved by the recent cases of the Donati and Frescobaldi plots, either of which infamously base attempts might have given up the Commonwealth to all the horrors of military tyranny and despotic government;—the discords and mismanagement, which had caused that notable uprising of the city and march to Prato to end so disgracefully in a catastrophe, which made an exhibition to all Italy of the impotence of the city, and invited the sneering ridicule of every enemy to popular government;—all these things had sunk deep into the popular mind, and produced a feeling of despondency, which was very foreign to the usual temper of the Florentine public. “Politics,” as the modern phrase is, were not, it should be well understood, interesting to the mediæval Florentine citizen, merely in the same sort, degree, and manner that they are to the millions of

\* Villani, book ix. chap. cxciv.

† Ammirato, book vi. Gonf. 195.



vast modern empires, however free, and however popularly governed. An individual member of a social body consisting of some thirty millions, especially an individual of the classes farthest removed from the duties and cares of governing, cannot feel that direct and personal interest in the public affairs that the member of a community numbering a few hundred thousand will feel. “Politics” were not in fourteenth-century Florence a matter, the duties of which were to be compendiously discharged by a vote, the consideration of which was to make matter for after-dinner talk. They were not a subject of satisfaction which could find its expression in an approving nod over the morning’s newspaper, or of discontent which might evaporate in a shrug. The public interests and the public fortunes were to those old Florentines matters of primary interest, often indeed superseding all private affairs and duties, matters requiring each citizen’s perpetual vigilance, and his not unfrequent action.

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It is necessary to bear this in mind, if we would rightly picture to ourselves the life of those Italian Communes. And the remarks apply to Florence in a stronger degree than to any other among them.

It was the 6th of May, 1325, in Florence, and matters were looking very gloomily. Pistoia, a position so important in every way as a bulwark between Florence and Lucca, lost to the city but yesterday, and gone to increase the power of the enemy, so alarmingly powerful already! Something must be done! But what? With the nobles, our natural military leaders, not a man of them to be trusted! With our foreign paid captains not worth much;—the best among them offended, and gone over to the enemy!

But suddenly on that May afternoon there was a busy buzz of tidings through every lane and remotest alley of the city. There is an arrival in Florence! Raimondo di

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Cardona, the celebrated captain, he who led the Papal forces but lately in Lombardy, and has been since then languishing in the dungeons of the Visconti at Milan, has just reached the city, when all the world thought him still in his Milanese prison! He effected his escape, made his way to the sea-side, took ship to Telamone,\* and came straight to Florence. He is now on the *piazza*, and all Florence is flocking thither! He is the man for Florence in her need! Out, every man of you, from your back streets and courtyards—tanners, smiths, marble workers, weavers, dyers! Leave the factories open! Never stay to close the gaping mouths of your cavernous dyeing-vaults on the Arno, vomiting forth clouds of steam from their cauldrons! Out, jolly dyers, with your brawny naked arms and chests stained with all the hues in your dyeing vats, and hurry away to the *piazza*, as you are to help in making Raimondo di Cardona general of our armies!

So the Florentines received their unexpected guest, as Ammirato says, “as if he were an angel sent them by heaven;” and he was appointed general of the Florentine forces within an hour after his arrival in the city,† and on the very next day marched out with such men-at-arms as could be got together at a moment’s notice, and gained some small successes against the enemy,—especially taking Artimino, a fortified post on a high isolated hill behind Signa.‡

But the Florentines were bent on doing greater things than these with their new general. It had for some time past been a strong and growing wish in the popular mind

\* The old Etruscan and then Roman port on the Tuscan sea; now a well-nigh abandoned hamlet, in the midst of poisonous Maremma marshes; but soon to be a port again and a railway terminus, giving life to a drained and reclaimed district.

† Villani, book ix. chap. cxcv.; Ammirato, book vi. Gonf. 195.

‡ Afterwards the seat of a hunting-box of the Medici, and now of a villa commanding one of the most magnificent views in Tuscany.

to fight a pitched battle with their detested and dreaded enemy Castruccio. The war between him and the Commonwealth had hitherto been confined to skirmishes, inroads, ravages of country, and the capture of towns and castles. And the people were bent on bringing the quarrel to the final arbitrament of a great and regular battle. Nevertheless there were reasons, which induced the more thoughtful part of the community to hesitate much ere deciding on so bold and hazardous a line of conduct. On the very night after Artimino was taken, a fiery meteor passed over Florence. Raimondo di Cardona, however able a general he might be, had just made his escape from a prison, which could scarcely be deemed a lucky omen. Then but a few nights before, an earthquake had been felt at Florence,—which must mean something ! And in April last such a quantity of snow had fallen all over Tuscany, that surely there was somewhat in the wind ! All these considerations were anxiously urged by the more educated portion of the citizens. But nothing could divert the people from their fixed idea, and it was found necessary to yield to the popular will.

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War was accordingly declared, with all due formality, against Castruccio on the 8th of June, 1325,\* and the army prepared for a campaign. On the 17th of that same month it marched out of Florence, with a strength of fifteen thousand infantry, all natives of Florence, or of its territory, and two thousand five hundred cavaliers, of whom one-fifth were Florentine citizens, and the remainder hired troops of various nations. Nearly four thousand horses were used for the transport of the baggage and stores of the army, and this branch of the service alone cost the Commonwealth three thousand crowns a day, “a sum which,” says Ammirato, “may well astonish any one

\* Villani, book ix. chap. ccc.



A.D. 1325. who considers the smallness of the Florentine territory at that time."

The army marched out with the "*carroccio*," and its attendant car with the war-bell, in front of the army. But its sound as it went at the head of the host, was drowned by that of all the bells of the city ringing out their parting blessings and wishes of good luck to the departing troops. But a gloom was suddenly thrown over this festive opening of the campaign, by an omen of evidently evil import. The bell on the Palazzo of the Podestà, the celebrated "*Montanina*," so called and much petted by the Florentine populace, because it had been captured from the castle of Montale, and brought in triumph to Florence, some quarter of a century before that time ;—the "*Montanina*" cracked itself at the first stroke of the clapper, and instead of ringing out a cheery farewell to the army, sounded what many felt to be a croaking warning.

The evil effect of this on the spirits of the soldiers was, however, very shortly afterwards relieved and counter-balanced by the excommunication of Castruccio, fulminated by the friendly Pope as his contribution to the efforts about to be made against the common enemy.

The army marched to Pistoia, where Castruccio then was, and strove to taunt him into giving them battle, by burning and ravaging the country around the town, and by celebrating on the 24th of June the usual Florentine games in honour of St. John, close under the walls of Pistoia. Castruccio was proof however against this favourite insult, which always seems to have enraged and tormented the victims of it, as much as it gratified the performers of the feat. He let them run their races, and play out their games under his nose to their heart's content, steadily refusing to quit his walls, while he knew himself to be inferior in strength to the enemy. Finding

it impossible to irritate the old soldier into fighting at a disadvantage, they broke up their camp before Pistoia, and marching into the Valdinievole, gained several unimportant successes against various small towns and fortresses of the Lucchese territory.

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Meantime, however, Castruccio was actively gathering forces from his Ghibelline allies; and when the Florentines succeeded in taking the more important fortified town and castle of Altopascio,\* which in a great measure opened to them the road to Lucca, he was ready to come out from Pistoia to look after them.

As usual, the Florentines lost several precious days in disputing on the course they should pursue. The pertinacious repetitions of the follies and mismanagement of this sort which occur again and again in the pages of the Florentine chronicles are such as to make the reader fancy that he must have missed the place in the volume, and got back to incidents that he had left years behind him. As before in the Valdarno, disputes arose in the camp between those who were for pushing on to Lucca, and those who deemed discretion the better part of valour, and would fain content themselves with the successes obtained. As before, the matter is referred to the Senate at home; and the Senate is as much divided on the question as the army. At last, however, it was determined that the forces should march on Lucca. Messer Raimondo di Cardona advanced a few miles, and took up a manifestly ill-chosen and disadvantageous position;—a blunder, of which Castruccio did not fail to take advantage. He came out from Pistoia; and some skirmishing between the armies took place, in which, though nothing decisive was accomplished, the advantage remained sufficiently on the

\* The traveller may see the harmless-looking little village on its knoll in the midst of the valley from the left-hand window of the railway carriage, as he rushes past between Pescia and Lucca.

A.D. 1325. side of Castruccio, to injure very notably the moral tone of the Florentine army.

But Castruccio was not yet quite ready for the great battle, which he was now as determined on fighting, as the Florentines had been, but were scarcely so still. He had sent to Galeazzo Visconti, to beg him to send him his son Azzo, who had already distinguished himself as a leader, with a strong body of reinforcements. And Visconti did not fail him. The young Azzo arrived with his forces in Lucca; but to Castruccio's infinite disgust, instead of marching on at once to join him in his camp near Altopascio, he began bargaining for money payment for himself and men, which Castruccio had not to give him. The old soldier threw himself into the saddle, and rode by night to Lucca, to see the young man. After a long interview, he succeeded in inducing him to limit his demands to 6000 golden florins, in place of the very much larger sum he had first asked; and having obtained from some Lucchese merchants a security for that sum, he received Azzo's promise to march with his troops the first thing in the morning. Castruccio, who was anxious to be absent from his camp as few hours as possible, could not stay in Lucca for the dawn; and set out to ride back at once to Altopascio. But fearing that Azzo might be dilatory in the morning, and knowing how much might depend on his arrival in the camp in good time, he had a hurried interview with his wife, before getting into the saddle for his night-ride back to the army; and told her to take with her some of the prettiest women in Lucca, and go to the young prince, and see to it that he was off in good time.

The following morning, the 23rd of September, 1325, Castruccio, instead of at once opening the general attack, for which he was now as anxious as the Florentines had been, when first they marched out of the city to seek him,



made demonstrations of wishing to avoid it. The Florentines were proportionably excited to eagerness for the battle. But Castruccio so ordered matters, that the first hours after the dawn were occupied in unimportant skirmishes, with no appreciable result. Scarcely however had the September sun risen high enough in the sky to make its rays felt, when Azzo and his squadron of cavaliers, coming from Lucca, appeared on the horizon. Then Castruccio knew that the hour for which he had been waiting was come. With consummate generalship he induced the Florentines to commence the attack, exactly when, and exactly where he wished them to do so. And in a very short time the great battle of Altopascio was lost and won. The incidents of the day ought to have been, but were not, an unforgotten lesson to the Florentines. All the foreign cavalry, which the citizens had hired, without regard to cost, and in which they put their main trust, comprising as it did cavaliers of name and fame of many nationalities, was routed at the first shock of the attack. Raimondo di Cardona was taken prisoner. His second in command, who turned and fled with all the cavalry led by him, almost without striking a blow, was, if not guilty of treason, as was suspected, guilty in any case of the grossest cowardice. The only part of the army which fought well, held its ground for awhile, and strove hard to avert the fortune of that fatal day, was the despised body of infantry, "all natives of Florence, and the country around," as we were told. Had the Florentines learned from this notable fact the wisdom it was so well calculated to teach them, that terrible day of Altopascio might have been the best and most fortunate for the Commonwealth that had ever yet shone on it. But the Florentines learned nothing; and similar causes produced similar effects, on an increasing scale, to the end of the chapter.

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A.D. 1325. The rout was a most complete one. The "*carroccio*" and the bell were both taken. The slaughter of knights in the field was not great. They ran away too quickly. But many fell in the flight and pursuit. Of the slaughter of the poor citizens and peasants on foot, who were fighting for their hearths and homesteads, of course small note was taken.

And thus of the four great battles, our story has had to record thus far,—Montaperti,\* Campaldino,† Montecatini,‡ and Altopascio,§—all save the second have been disastrous defeats for the Florentines. ||

\* 4th September, 1260.

† 11th June, 1289.

‡ 29th August, 1315.

§ 23rd September, 1325.

|| Villani, book ix. chaps. cciv. ccv. ccvi.; Ammirato, book vi. Gonf. 197.

## CHAPTER II.

Results of the defeat of Altopascio—Castruccio before Florence—Valdarno ravaged—Races run beneath the walls of Florence—Castruccio enters Lucca in triumph—Distress of Florence—Charles, Duke of Calabria, made Lord of Florence—Piero di Narsi beheaded by Castruccio in Pistoia—First appearance in Florence of Walter de Brienne, Duke of Athens—Plan of Castruccio to drown all Florence by damming the Arno at Signa—Duke of Calabria passes through Siena—Arrives in Florence—His demands for money—For increased power—The nobles support his demands—He pacifies the people by withdrawing them—The Duke does nothing towards repressing Castruccio—The Emperor Louis the Bavarian comes into Tuscany—Duke of Calabria quits Florence—Florentines take Pistoia—Castruccio lays siege to Pistoia—Florentine army marches to relieve the town—fails to do so—and marches into the Valdarno—Castruccio takes Pistoia—Pisa offered by the inhabitants to the Emperor—Castruccio determined to hold Pisa by force against the Emperor—The Florentines prepare for new struggles with Castruccio—The Emperor marches towards Florence—But is diverted by a proposal of Peter of Aragon that he should first make himself master of Telamone—Florence saved by this delay from a coalition against her of the Emperor and Castruccio—Death of Castruccio.

THE immediate consequences of the defeat of Altopascio were more deplorable for Florence than had been those of any one of the former disasters of the same kind. Their conqueror upon this occasion was a man of boundless ambition, of considerable political as well as military talent, of far-sighted views, indefatigable activity, and utterly unscrupulous determination. He lost no time in following up the heavy blow he had dealt his great enemy—the only enemy, it may be said, that stood in his way to as extended a domination in Tuscany as that of the Visconti in Lombardy—by a series of rapid operations which reduced



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Florence to a lower point of distress and humiliation than she had ever known yet.

To recover all the positions which the Florentines had taken from him in the previous months of the war, was to Castruccio the work of a few days. Then advancing towards the city, driving in the garrisons of the castles and the inhabitants of the villages before him, he came, on the 1st of October, to San Moro, a little hamlet in the midst of the Valdarno between Signa and Prato, some three or four miles from Florence. On the evening of the 2nd, he pitched his camp at Peretola, a village on the road to Arezzo, not more than two miles from the city.

Notwithstanding the continual wars with her neighbours on all sides, in which Florence had been engaged for the last two hundred years, the city and the territory immediately around the walls—the “*contado*” of Florence, as it was called—had never been profaned by the presence of a hostile force. And the dismay, grief, and humiliation in the city caused by this advance of Castruccio, up almost to their very walls, was much what Londoners would feel if a French army were encamped at Hampstead. Yet Florence was so thoroughly cowed and disheartened, that, notwithstanding the vast number of fighting men of all grades who were shut up within her walls, no whisper was heard of making an effort or a sally against the enemy. There the citizens remained within their jealously-guarded circuit, filled to choking with the runaway champions whom they had hired, and the inhabitants of the surrounding villages, who had sought shelter within the walls, looking on from their towers and battlements at the destruction of their country. Castruccio did not spare them. Up to the very gates of the city he destroyed and burned everything between the foot of the mountains and the Arno. The 3rd of October was employed by his army in gathering and sending off to Lucca every sort of moveable property they

could lay their hands on. The 4th and the 5th were spent in cutting down trees, and vines, and crops, and burning and razing habitations. He did not even, says the historian, spare the monasteries of either sex, or the churches; “to the destruction of a vast quantity of noble works of painting, which had begun to flourish wonderfully in those days. The whole territory around Florence was at that time abundantly adorned by such works, the result both of the natural taste of the Florentines, who, accustomed as they were to make large fortunes by their industry and trade, spent their money freely in magnificent buildings, and of the great abundance of admirable artists. Castruccio had therefore ample opportunity of wreaking his fury.”\*

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But the spirit, which animated the heart of every victor of those days, would not have been satisfied without adding insult to injury. Indeed, the general practice of the times shows that the former was felt to be the sweeter of the two to the victor, and the harder to be borne by the vanquished. Accordingly the usual sport of running races under the walls of the city to be insulted, was practised on the evening of the 4th of October. It was an understood thing, that the prizes in these races, consisting of a trophy of some sort, represented the “*spolia opima*” of the city which was so far conquered as not to dare to come forth from its walls to prevent the running of such a race. Castruccio, to make the thing complete, caused these races to be run from the very foot of the walls to Peretola;—the first for horses; the second by men on foot; and the third by infamous women. “And so the Florentines dragged through this miserable time, like people lost and undone, thinking only of the safety of the city, and abandoning all idea of credit or honour.”† At last he returned

\* Ammirato, *loc. cit.*

† Villani, book ix. chap. ccexx. The historian does not mean that the “honour” of the Commonwealth was lost in our sense of the phrase; but

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1325. to Lucca, at the desire of Azzo Visconti, who was anxious to receive his money, and be off home to Lombardy, leaving the whole country on that side of Florence absolutely a desert. The young Visconti begged also, that the prisoner Raimondo di Cardona, who had escaped from his father's dungeons, should be given up to him; a request which Castruccio promised to grant, "as soon as he had done with him; as he wanted to use him in the triumphal entry he purposed making into Lucca;"—as in fact he did on the 10th of November following.

Immense were the preparations made for this feast of glory to be offered to himself by the great captain. It was to be modelled on the Imperial triumphs of the old Roman time; and a great number of "the most honourable personages in Italy," we are assured, flocked to Lucca to witness a spectacle that had not been seen for so many ages. Castruccio entered, however, not according to classical precedent on a triumphal car, but on a magnificent charger, escorted by all the clergy, the principal men, and the ladies of Lucca. Before him marched all his captives, with their hands tied in front of them in the form of a cross;—then the captured *carroccio*, followed by the standards of the city and those of King Robert reversed, and trailing in the dust. After the *carroccio* came all the prisoners of rank, knights and captains, among whom there were three of special name, who, belonging as they happened to do, to three different nationalities, were thought to add a notable enhancement to the magnificence of the triumph, as showing the extent of the victor's conquest. These were "Urlimbacca," a German leader of free lances; Piero di Narsi, a French knight, who became afterwards, when he was ransomed, General-in-chief in the Florentine service; and the Spaniard Raimondo di Cardona.

- that the citizens were too dejected and miserable to be roused to care about the taunts and insults of the victor.



A remark made by the historian Ammirato,\* that nothing in all the ceremony so irked the minds of these prisoners, as being compelled to carry in their hands wax tapers, as an offering by the victor at the shrine of St. Martin, shows how difficult it is for us, at this distance of time, to appreciate or understand the sentiments and ideas of a period removed from us by only some ten or twelve generations.

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The remaining months of the year 1325 were probably the most disastrous and humiliating through which the Commonwealth ever passed. Castruccio took but a short period of repose for the enjoyment of his triumph, and again returned to overrun the Florentine territory, taking castles and sacking villages at his pleasure. And this was not all that the miserable cowed and cowering citizens had to endure. The overcrowded state of the city, filled with the mercenary soldiers of many nations, soon caused pestilence to make its appearance among them ; and a great mortality ensued.

In the midst of these troubles, the Signory, which took office for the last two months of the year, "considering that the enemy was brandishing his sword under the walls of Florence, and over the heads of its inhabitants ;—that Signa was occupied, Prato laid waste, and the *contado* ruined by him ;—that Montemurlo† was besieged ;—that the army of the Bolognese, which had been counted on as a means of making head against the enemy in Lombardy, was broken and dispersed ;—that the best captains in the service of the Commonwealth were prisoners ;—that the number of the troops was diminished, the expenses increased, and the citizens discouraged ;—and, in a word, that everything was going against Florence and in favour of its enemies,"‡—determined to have recourse to the old

\* Book vi. Gonf. 198.

† A remarkable isolated hill at the foot of the mountains between Prato and Pistoia.

‡ Ammirato, book vi. Gonf. 199.

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The terms of the bargain made with him on the 23rd of December were as follows:—

The ten years are to be counted from his arrival in Florence, which should not be later than the following April.

The Duke shall reside personally in Florence at least thirty months; or in any country where he may be engaged in war on account of the Commonwealth.

In time of war he shall maintain a thousand horsemen from the northern side of the Alps;\* and receive from the Commonwealth 200,000 golden florins a year;—in time of peace he shall maintain four hundred cavaliers, and receive 100,000 florins only.

If in time of peace the Duke does not wish to reside in Florence, he must maintain there a Lieutenant of his own family, or some “great Lord,” as also a Vicar to administer justice.

He shall not in any respect change the form of the constitution; but shall defend and maintain the Gonfaloniere, the Priori, the Executor of the “*Ordini di Giustizia*,” and the Gonfalonieri of the militia companies.

On this understanding, which was quite sure to be punctually carried out in at least that one of its provisions relating to the remuneration of the royal hireling, the Duke of Calabria reached Florence on the 30th of July, thus beginning his service by breaking one of the conditions of it. Nor did he come even then, without having

\* A curious admission of the superiority of such to the Italians.

been urged by a special embassy sent to entreat him to do so, and perform something for his wages. For, in truth, the need of the Commonwealth was extreme. A.D.  
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Piero di Narsi, having been ransomed from his prison in Lucca, was in the meantime appointed general of the Florentine forces. Knowing that he had the command only temporarily, till the Duke should arrive, and anxious, as Ammirato says, "to do something in that time to show his valour and zeal for the Commonwealth," he could think of nothing better than a plot for the murder of Castruccio, to be executed by a chosen band of his own men under his guidance. Some of those, however, entrusted with the secret, betrayed it to Castruccio, who took steps to ensure the capture of the unlucky Frenchman by means of an ambush, into which he fell, when in the act of placing himself in ambush to assassinate Castruccio. He was taken accordingly, and carried captive into Pistoia, where he was beheaded on the Piazza the next morning, Castruccio alleging that he had broken his parole, given, as the Ghibelline general asserted, when he was admitted to ransom, not to bear arms again against Lucca. That great man took advantage also of the occasion to say a few animated words of virtuous indignation at a deed, which, substituting stealthy murder for valour in the field, sapped the foundation of all military honour;—sentiments particularly edifying in the mouth of him, who had suborned assassins to murder Thieri della Gherardesca in Pisa; and had been the author of more treasons than any half-dozen other men of his time.

No event of all this disastrous period made a more painful impression on the Florentine people, than this public and disgraceful execution of their general-in-chief on the Piazza of a neighbouring city. They began to think that the unseen power, which some men call "luck," and some call "Providence," was against them, and that



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“the stars in their courses fought against” Florence. They were somewhat consoled, however, by the timely arrival on the 17th of May, 1326, only three days after the execution of Narsi, in Pistoia, of Walter de Brienne, Duke of Athens, who had been sent with four hundred cavaliers by the Duke of Calabria as his lieutenant, till he should be able to come to Florence in person. This Gualtieri di Brenna, as the Italian historians call him, but more infamous in popular Florentine story, as the Duke of Athens, was (before the Florentines had an opportunity of knowing him) “much esteemed both for the splendour of his family, descended from a king of Jerusalem, and because he was married to Beatrice, daughter of the Prince of Taranto, King Robert’s brother,”\* and so cousin to the new generalissimo, the Duke of Calabria.

Whatever comfort could be found in the presence among them of so great a personage was not administered to the citizens a day too soon. Castruccio had again begun to ravage the country, advancing with 800 horse and 3000 foot almost to the city walls. Finding that he could not provoke the citizens to come out from the shelter of their fortifications, he retired to Signa, and there planned one of the most singular enterprizes ever imagined by the ingenuity that has been employed for so many ages in the destruction of mankind and the defacement of the world.

It has been mentioned in a former chapter, in which an account was given of one of the earliest expeditions of the Florentines against the feudal lord of a castle, commanding the pass of Signa, that the Arno there leaves the wide basin in which Florence stands, and passes through a gorge in the hills into the lower Valdarno, which stretches thence to Pisa. This spot is about seven miles from Florence.

\* Ammirato, book vi. Gonf. 201.

The road thence to Pisa and Leghorn takes advantage of the passage which the river has opened for itself; and latterly, space has with some difficulty been found to squeeze the railroad in between them. Now it struck Castruccio, that if he could only build a water-tight wall across this gorge in the rocks, he could accomplish the master-stroke of drowning all Florence, and the whole extent of the upper Valdarno. The idea was a veritable flash of genius, and the execution, as he felt, would have given him rank among the greatest destroyers the world has seen. But his engineers showed him that to produce in any degree the effect desired, his wall must be an hundred and fifty *braccia*, or nearly three hundred feet, high. And before that fact, he with much reluctance and regret abandoned the design.

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The Duke of Athens meanwhile was employing himself in recruiting and reconstructing the Florentine army; and the citizens, recovering a little from their prostration, began to conceive hopes of revenging themselves by the help of their new general for all the ills they had suffered. Nothing however of any importance was done before the Duke of Calabria's arrival. On the 10th of July it was known in Florence that he had arrived in Siena; and, as it happened that that city was in a state of disturbance on account of a deadly feud between the Tolomei and the Salimbeni families, which it was feared might lead to a revolution, having for its object to destroy the Guelph government in power at Siena, and substitute a Ghibelline one in its place; and as such an event would have been extremely prejudicial to Florentine interests, inasmuch as it would in all probability have thrown Siena into alliance with Castruccio, the Signory sent messengers to the Duke of Calabria, begging him not to quit Siena till he had taken measures to set that feud at rest. The Duke did as he was bid;—patched up a peace between the two families

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for five years;—obtained as a reward for doing it the Signory of Siena for that period; which piece of preferment we must suppose, was found to be tenable with that of Florence, the two cities being only forty miles apart;—and having consumed eighteen days in arranging these matters, sent in to the Florentines a little bill of sixteen thousand golden florins for his services during that period, observing, that he had remained in Siena at their orders, and that such service did not enter into the duties of his place of Lord of Florence.

The good burghers delighted at having a real royal prince in their service, paid without grumbling; and gave him such a reception, say the chroniclers, as had not been seen for a long time in any city of Italy on the arrival of any King, Pope, or Emperor whatever. The Duke brought with him his Duchess, the daughter of Charles de Valois, and Prince John of the Morea, his uncle, accompanied also by the Princess. There was “Filippo Despoto di Romania,” the Duke’s cousin also, and numbers of other high and mighty lords and ladies. It was very gratifying to the citizens, naturally so,—but costly, as all those shreds and slips of royalty held out their hands for vails, and got them very unstintingly. Truly, as Pope Boniface said, Florence was the fountain-head of gold in those days. And, “it was a marvel to all the nations of Italy, that the Florentine people, masters of so small a territory, and that not a fertile one, after all the reverses, and disasters inflicted on them by Castruccio, after the enormous expenses they had supported, and when they were, as it seemed, at the last gasp, should have been able to hire a prince of so great authority, and such a numerous and noble array of barons with him. For counting the four hundred cavaliers of the Duke of Athens, and those who came from Provence, there were two thousand foreign knights in the city.” \*

\* Ammirato, book vi. Conf. 202.



The first measures of the Duke, as soon as the festivities of his reception had come to an end, were not calculated to reassure the citizens as to the value of the services it had cost them so much to secure. He made demands for increased power and more money; and worse than that, did little or nothing towards repressing the power of Castruccio. He wanted absolute power to name the Signory at his pleasure, to absolve by his sole authority all exiles, bandits, and outlaws, and permit their return to the city, and to impose taxes by simple decree. The nobles, thinking they saw in such tendencies an opportunity of getting rid entirely of the popular constitution, strongly urged that the Duke should be entrusted with absolute power purely and simply and without restriction. But Charles, having some knowledge of the Florentine character, instead of insisting on his demands, allowed them in great part to drop, and sided openly and strongly with the people in the disputes to which this proposal gave rise, declaring that he by no means wished any such power, nor judged it wise to accord such to any ruler. By this judicious conduct he obtained all that he had asked for, except the right to impose taxes, which the Signory modestly said "whenever it should be necessary, they preferred doing themselves." He obtained also an additional 30,000 golden florins for the hire of more troops, which he declared to be necessary for the war. Great preparations indeed were made for resuming hostilities against Castruccio. All the allied Guelph cities were required to send in their contingents of men, and did so. But the Duke, to the surprise of everybody, did not take the field. It was thought that his father, King Robert, retained too vivid a recollection of the last great battle in which a prince of his house had commanded the Florentine army, and which had been fatal to one of his sons. In any case nothing was done; and when at the

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end of the first year of the Duke's signory, it was found that he had in one way or another cost the city more than 450,000 golden florins ;\*—that all that had been got for this was, that “ every matter small and great in Florence was ruled by the Duke's counsellors and creatures ;—that the Signory was so reduced and cowed that the Priori did not dare to do the least thing, nor so much as send off a messenger ;—that a counsellor of the Duke was always at their elbow, so that the citizens, who were used to govern their own city, were ruled by men less worthy and less wise than themselves,”† a strong feeling of discontent became very general in the city.

Meanwhile Louis of Bavaria, who had by amicable arrangement with his competitor Frederick of Austria, become Emperor, had been invited by the Ghibellines to march into Italy to support their party, and specially to make head against Robert of Naples. Louis was crowned with the iron crown at Milan in May, 1327 ; marched into Tuscany, and was received by Castruccio in Lucca in November of that year, created his host Duke of that city, and in December left Tuscany for Rome.

Under these circumstances the Duke of Calabria thought it necessary to hurry southwards to defend his father's kingdom. So leaving Florence to take care of itself, he started thence on the 28th of December, 1327, having in the nineteen months of his rule caused the Commonwealth an expense of 900,000 golden florins,‡ and done absolutely nothing towards the carrying on of the war.

Castruccio had followed his friend and patron the Emperor to Rome shortly after the departure of the latter, so that Florence was left a breathing space to look into her

\* Villani, book x. chap. x. It should be remembered that this amounted to the almost incredible, but yet perfectly well authenticated sum of 56,250 ounces of pure gold.

† Villani, *loc. cit.*

‡ Villani, book x. chap. xlix.

affairs by the absence of her great enemy, and that, perhaps hardly less desirable, of her great friend.

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On the 28th of the following month, January, 1328, Pistoia was taken by a night surprise by the French soldiers left by the Duke of Calabria in Florence, and the miserable city was given up for ten days to the brutality of these foreign soldiers. But the triumph of this success,—the first of any moment that the Commonwealth had achieved for so long a time,—was not of long duration. For no sooner had the indefatigable Castruccio heard of this disaster to his arms than he set out instantly to repair it. Leaving Rome on the 1st of February with five hundred cavaliers and a thousand cross-bowmen, he soon left them behind him in his impatience; and pressing on with only twelve other horsemen, he rode through the Maremma at very great risk from the bands of robbers by whom it was infested, and reached Pisa in what was then deemed the wonderfully short space of nine days.

The sudden difference that the presence of such a man made in Tuscany might have given a lesson to all German emperors and others engaged in the attempt to acquire and govern dominions far away from the seat of their own power, and to which they could never give their continued personal superintendence. The personal qualities of rulers counted for too much in those times and countries to admit of the success of vicarial government. Returned to the scene of his triumphs and prestige, Castruccio found little difficulty in making himself lord of Pisa to begin with. And he lost no time in making use of all the resources of that rich city, increased by the imposition of new taxes, for the getting together of sufficient means in men and money to be used in recovering Pistoia.

Meanwhile the Florentines were wasting the precious months in quarrelling with the General left in Florence at the head of the foreign forces by the Duke of Calabria, as



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to whose duty it was to victual and garrison Pistoia. The Frenchman maintained that he had done his part in taking the city, and it behoved the Florentines to provide for its defence. The Signory replied that it was expressly to provide for such expenses that they paid the Duke 200,000 florins a year; and that besides this, the amount of booty taken in Pistoia was such as ought to make those who had been enriched by it both abundantly able and willing to furnish the necessary expenses.

While the Florentines were thus busied in talking instead of doing, Castruccio sent the forces he had been actively preparing to lay siege to Pistoia on the 13th of May, 1328, and followed them himself on the 30th of that month.

Then Florence began to bestir herself; collected assistance from all the Guêlph cities, hired more foreign troops, at an expense infinitely greater, than would have been needed to put Pistoia into a thoroughly defensible condition; subsidized the Bolognese with ten thousand florins, and on the 13th of July marched out with two thousand six hundred cavaliers, and foot soldiers "innumerable," to raise the siege and relieve Pistoia. The force of Castruccio did not amount to more than sixteen hundred horse, and infantry in proportion, and he declined the battle to which the Florentine commanders endeavoured to provoke him, contenting himself with entrenching his camp and strengthening his position by barricades of felled trees.

Villani, enumerating the various elements of the Florentine forces, remarks, as a strong point in their favour, that "the greater part of the cavalry was from beyond the Alps." It is curious to observe this constant tendency to rate foreign higher than native thews and sinews, and to trust to hired help rather than to native patriotism. On almost every occasion the result furnished a severe lesson to the employers of foreign troops. The splendid

army got together at such vast cost before Pistoia was almost useless,—quite so indeed as regarded the main object in hand. The leaders disputed with each other. The foreign troopers fraternized during the intervals of hostilities with others their fellows in the camp of the enemy. Suspicions of treason arose. And eventually the Florentine generals, “having trumpeted a final challenge” to Castruccio to come out from his defences and fight them, which he was too wise to do, broke up their camp, and divided their forces into bands, which occupied themselves, as usual when nothing better could be done, in damaging the territory of the enemy. One portion of the Florentine force menaced Pisa and Lucca, but failed by that means to draw off Castruccio from the great object of recovering Pistoia; which having been left unprovisioned by the Florentines, and now seeing itself deserted by the relieving army, submitted on the third of August;—to the great chagrin of the Florentine people, who felt bitterly the disgrace of having wholly failed with a force nearly double that of the enemy to prevent his taking from them an important city within twenty miles of their own capital.\*

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Castruccio, now once again absolute master of Lucca, Pisa, and Pistoia; still in the prime of life, being in his forty-seventh year; universally recognized as the greatest captain of his time, at all events to the south of the Alps; and having made himself, from being a simple Lucchese citizen and exile, absolutely necessary to the great Ghibelline party and the powerful princes, whose most vital interests were bound up with the ascendancy of it;—Castruccio Castracane was at this period, more than ever in a position calculated to foster schemes of yet higher ambition. Nevertheless, there were difficulties around his

\* Villani, book x. chap. lxxxv.; Ammirato, book vii. Gonf. 212.

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present path. When on his return from Rome he had seized the supreme power in Pisa, that portion of the inhabitants which was opposed to him had endeavoured to foil his plans, by offering the lordship of the city to the Emperor Louis of Bavaria. But the Emperor, though much tempted by such an offer, had felt that he could not afford to come to an open rupture with Castruccio; and had replied to the Pisans, that he could not meddle in any such matter; but that they might, if they liked, make their offer to the Empress. The lady jumped at the proposal, and sent a "Vicario" to take possession of the city in her name.

Galeazzo Visconti was at that time living as a guest with Castruccio, having been turned out of the sovereignty of Milan by the Emperor, on his first arrival in Italy, in consequence of Visconti's refusal to impose a tax upon his subjects in favour of the imperial coffers. The fact was, that he had already drained his subjects' purses so dry, and raised so much disaffection among them, that he dared not do as the Emperor desired. Whereupon the latter, with very short-sighted policy, considering that the Visconti were the mainstay and best supporters of the Ghibelline cause in Lombardy, took advantage of the discontent of the Milanese, raised a rebellion against the Visconti, drove them from the city, and then readily obtained from the citizens the supplies of which he stood in need. This conduct of the Emperor had produced a great effect on the mind of Castruccio. He saw in it a warning, that Louis could not be trusted as a loyal chief of the Ghibelline cause, and that should the occasion offer, the same fate might happen to him which had happened to the Visconti, now an exiled pensioner on his hospitality. So, after two days of doubt, he determined that it was not worth while to lose Pisa for the sake of keeping on good terms with the Emperor, if the latter chose to quarrel



with him on the subject. So he suddenly arrested and imprisoned the Empress's Vicar and other adherents, and caused himself to be formally declared Lord of Pisa. A.D.  
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Nevertheless, he was desirous of remaining on good terms with the Emperor, at all events for the present, if the latter would allow him to do so. And as Louis was very soon after the fall of Pistoia returning northwards from Rome, without having accomplished anything save exciting the violent discontent and anger of the Romans by the predatory habits of his troops, Castruccio sent proposals to him to march his army through Tuscany, opening new schemes of great things to be done against Florence by their mutual co-operation, and promising to return with him the following year to assist in a campaign against Naples.\* The Florentine historians, however, assert that he was at the same time making proposals of peace to the Signory of Florence, having no faith in the Emperor, and deeming it wise, in the partial break up of the great Ghibelline party by the ruin of the Visconti, to content himself with securing what he already held.

The Florentines, however, trusted him as little as he trusted the Emperor; and once more prepared for new efforts in the field against him. Among other provisions, the Signory wrote to King Robert, requesting him to send back his son, the Duke of Calabria; and intimating, that if he did not return to his duty, they should not pay the 200,000 florins, but only such part of that sum, as the real pay of the troops left in Florence by the Duke might amount to;—which they estimated to be not more than 120,000 florins. Notwithstanding the immense sums which the Commonwealth had expended during the war with Castruccio, means were now found, though not

\* Ammirato, book vii. Gonf. 214.

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1328. without difficulty, for putting into a perfect state of defence all the fortresses of both the upper and lower Valdarno. So much difficulty had the Signory in finding the money to meet these expenses, that a forced contribution was exacted from the clergy, on the pretext of an old papal letter issued on some previous occasion.

Meanwhile the Emperor was slowly making his way northwards, stopping on his road here and there to extract money from different cities, and preparing a combined attack on Florence, in alliance with Castruccio. The city looked forward to the storm about to break over it, with greater apprehension than had ever been felt before in the worst epoch of its history. If Castruccio alone was able to reduce us to the condition in which we were after the battle of Altopascio, what, it was argued, will be the result of a union between him and the Imperial forces?

This dreaded combination however was deferred for a short space, by the intervention of yet another enemy, Peter of Aragon, the son of Frederick, King of Sicily. The Aragonese dynasty in Sicily, was as much Ghibelline in its traditional politics, as the French dynasty in Naples was Guelph. These two houses were in continual war with each other on quarrels of their own; but the Sicilian monarch was as natural an ally of the Emperor as his neighbour of Naples was of Florence. Now, while Louis was encamped before Todi, and was making his arrangements for the attack on Florence, messengers came to him from Peter of Aragon, telling him that their sovereign had just arrived by sea at Corneto, and begging the Emperor to come there to meet him, for the prosecution of certain plans expedient for their common interest. The proposal was, that while Peter with the forces he had brought with him should besiege the port and town of Telamone, Louis should take Grosseto, "in order to prevent the Florentines

from using this road and port for their merchandize.” \*  
 It was then August; and it seems strange that such a month should have been selected for such an enterprize. The two towns in question, are situated in the most unhealthy part of the Maremma; and unless the sanitary conditions of the district were widely different then from what they are now, an army undertaking the siege of either of the places named at that period of the year, must have been exposed to certain destruction.

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The delay occasioned in the ulterior plans of the Emperor by this interruption was not a long one; for Telamone had been already taken before the end of August, and Grosseto was then on the point of falling. But it was sufficient to save Florence from the greatest danger that had ever yet threatened her. For while the two monarchs were yet engaged in the Maremma, the news reached them of the death of Castruccio.

He died at Lucca, on the 3rd of September, in the 47th year of his age, of a fever caught by over-exertion in the great heats of summer.

His death was so carefully concealed, that the news of it did not reach Florence till the 10th. But the effect which the tidings then produced in the city, is described to have been beyond all belief. For a while the citizens seemed to feel as if it were impossible that so great and unexpected a deliverance could be real! All the misfortunes, all the ruin seemed to be suddenly at an end, as when the sun shines brilliantly out after being obscured by black clouds. They cared nothing for Louis, the Emperor, or for any other enemies. The terrible Castruccio would scatter their armies and ravage their country no more;—and that was enough. All other troubles they could cope with. The Emperor, and the Ghibelline party

\* Ammirato, book vii. Gonf. 215,

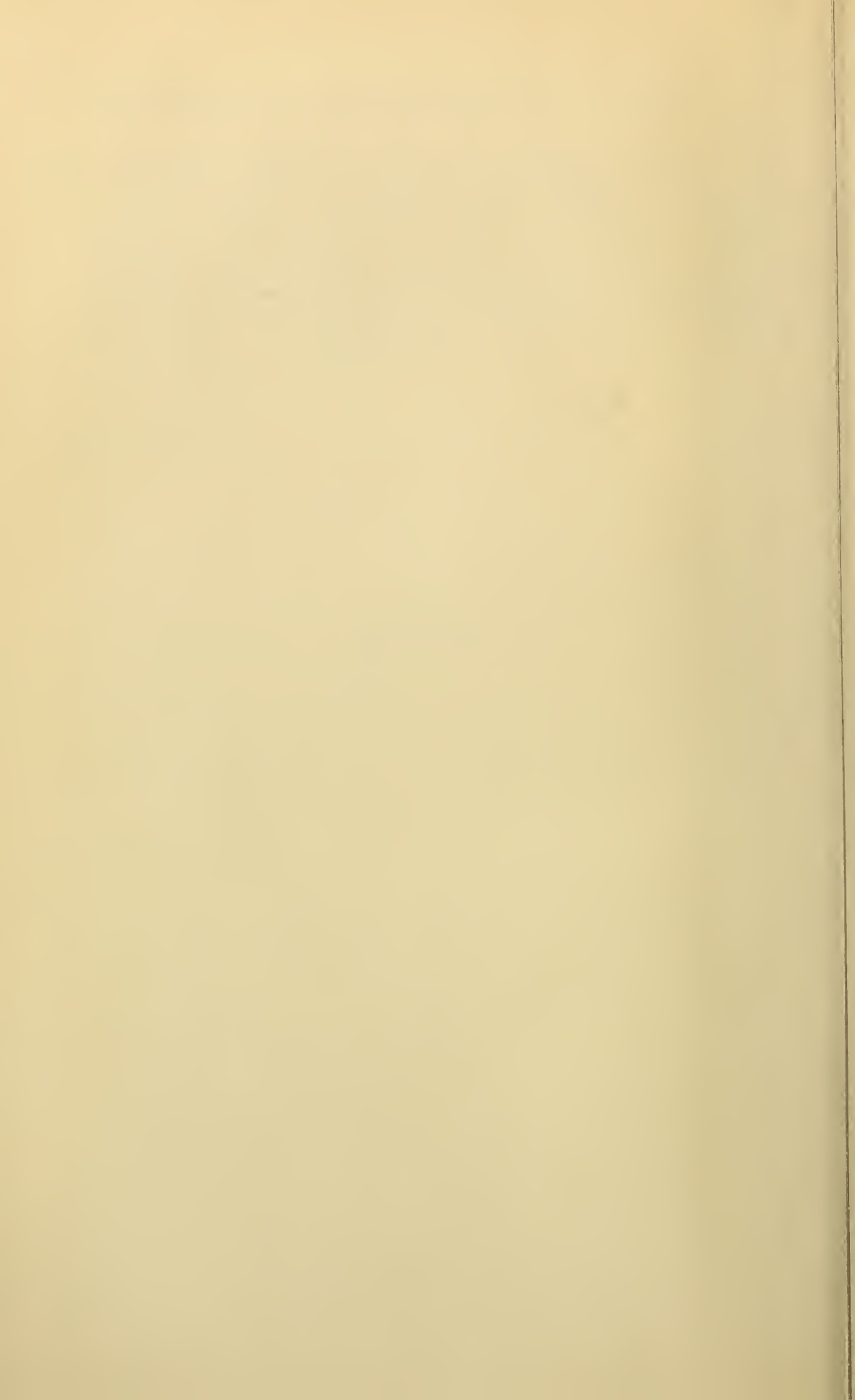


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throughout Italy, felt that this untimely death would change the face of affairs most materially in Tuscany. And the dismay which fell upon the whole party of his friends, no less than the unmeasured exultation of his enemies, testify sufficiently to the fact, that this Lucchese citizen was the most able and remarkable man, that this story has as yet encountered.

END OF VOL. I.











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